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THE THREE FURLONGERS

BY

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

First Am Division
Lorraine Cover!

THE THREE FURLONGERS

This One

K68X-YH8-7CQ3

With out-stretched arms she rushed to one of them

~ Page 10

THE THREE FURLONGERS

BY

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

AUTHOR OF "SPELL LAND," "ISLE OF THORNS," ETC.

There may be hope above,
  There may be rest beneath;
  We know not—only Death
Is palpable—and love.
—DOLBEN.

PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1914

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CONTENTS

BOOK I

THREE AGAINST THE WORLD

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Sparrow Hall	9
II.	Shovelstrode	20
III.	In the Rain	31
IV.	Fate's Afterthought	40
V.	The Hero	53
VI.	Thick Woods	63
VII.	Over the Gates of Paradise	75
VIII.	Brambletye	86
IX.	Some People Are Happy—In Different Ways	97
X.	Tony Backs an Outsider	109
XI.	Disillusion at Sixteen	122
XII.	Children Dancing in the Dusk	135
XIII.	Keeping Christmas	145
XIV.	Woods at Dawn	161
XV.	The Sermon on Forgiveness	173

BOOK II

THE WORLD AGAINST THE THREE

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Glimpses and Dreams	187
II.	The Letter That Did Not Come	201
III.	Only a Boy	213
IV.	Flames	228
V.	Cowsanish	237
VI.	And I Also Dreamed	252
VII.	Woods at Night	259
VIII.	Vigil	268
IX.	And You Also Said	280
X.	A Toast	300

BOOK I

THREE AGAINST THE WORLD

THE THREE FURLONGERS

This One

K68X-YH8-7CQ3

"Ye—es."

"Nigel, my boy, you haven't let the grass grow under your feet."

"Idiot!—we never exchanged a word except in the way of business. She wanted to know my name, but I took care to say Smith. There was nothing exciting about it at all—only an infernal loss of time."

"Quite so. You didn't find me in a particularly good temper when you turned up at Hackenden."

"The first words that passed between us were—'Is that you, you ass?' and 'Yes, you fool.' We haven't done the thing properly at all—we've forgotten to fall on each other's necks."

"Let's do it now," said Len, and the two boys collapsed into a mock embrace, in the grips of which they staggered up and down the kitchen, knocking over several chairs.

"Oh, stop, you duffers!" shouted Janet; but she was laughing. "Nigel hasn't changed a bit," she said to herself.

"What have they been doing to your clothes?" asked Leonard, as his brother finally hurled him off. "They stink, lad, they stink."

"They've been fumigated," said Nigel. "I've worn off some of the reek in the train, but to-morrow Janey shall peg 'em out to air."

"We'll hang 'em across the road from the orchard. Lord! won't the Wilderwick freaks sit up!"

"It'll take ages to get that smell out," said Janet ruefully, "and your hair, too, Nigel—when'll that look decent again?"

"I say, stop your personal remarks, you two—and give me something to eat. I'm all one aching void."

Janet took the soup off the fire, and slopped it into three blue bowls. Nigel went round the table, setting straight the spoons and forks, which Janey seemed to have flung on from a distance.

"What's that for?" she asked.

The young man started, then flushed slightly.

"Hullo! I didn't notice what I was doing. I always had to do that in prison."

"Put things straight?—what a good idea!"

"Yes. Everything had to be straight—in rows. Ugh!"

For the first time he looked self-conscious.

"Well, it's a very good habit to have got into. You may be quite useful now."

"I'm damned if I'd have done it," said Leonard.

"You had to do it," said Nigel; "if you didn't . . ." and a shudder passed over him.

"What?" asked his brother and sister with interest.

He flushed more deeply, and the muscles of his face quivered.

Then a surprising, terrible thing happened—so surprising and so terrible that Leonard and Janey could only stand and gape. Nigel hid his face in his hands, and began to cry.

For some moments they stared at him with blank, horror-stricken eyes. Scarcely a minute ago he had been uproarious—forgetting pain and shame in the substantial ecstasies of reunion, smothering—after the Furlonger habit—all memories of

anguish in a joke. Never since his earliest manhood had they seen him cry, not even on the day they had said good-bye to him for so long. Now he was crying miserably, weakly, hopelessly — crying quietly like a child, his hands covering his eyes, his shoulders shaking a little. Then suddenly he gasped, almost whimpered—

"Don't ask me those questions. Don't ask me any more questions."

"Nigel," cried Janet, finding her tongue at last, "I'm so sorry. I didn't know you minded. Please don't cry any more—it hurts us."

"We didn't mean anything, old man," said Leonard huskily. "Do cheer up, and forget all about it."

Nigel took away his hands from his eyes, and Len and Janey glanced quickly at each other. They had expected to see his face swollen and disfigured, but except for a slight redness round the eyes it was quite unchanged. They both knew that it is only the faces of those who cry continually which are so little altered by tears.

For a moment they could not speak. A chill seemed to have dropped on Sparrow Hall, and all three heard the moaning of the wind—as it swept up to the windows, rattled them, then seemed to hurry away, sighing over the fields.

"Come, drink your soup, old chap," said Janet, pulling up his chair to the table. "Write me down an ass, a tactless ass," she growled to herself; "but how could I know he would take on that way?"

Nigel obediently began to swallow the soup,

while Len and Janey talked across him with laboured airiness about the weather. After the soup came bacon and eggs, and potatoes cooked in their skins. Nigel's spirits began to rise—he seemed childishly delighted with the food, though Janet's cooking was sketchy in the extreme. When the meal was over, he joined in the washing up, which was done at a sink in the corner of the kitchen.

"What sort of people are the Lowes?" he asked suddenly, polishing a fork with a vigour and thoroughness which made Leonard and Janey tremble lest he should realise what he was doing. "What sort of people are the Lowes?"

Janet flushed.

"Oh, they're quite ordinary," said Leonard, "quite ordinarily unpleasant, I mean. The old chap's narrow and pious, like most devil-dodgers, and the young 'un's like an ape."

"And they've got all the Kent land?"

"Oh, it's nothing to speak of. You know that end was always too low for wheat"—poor Len was in a panic lest his brother should begin to cry again.

But, strangely enough, Nigel was able to discuss the fallen fortunes of Sparrow Hall with even less emotion than Len and Janey. The tides of his grief seemed to find their way into small streams only. It was about the side-issues of their tragedy that he asked most questions. Was Leonard still going to have a man to help him, now his brother had returned?—Was any profit likely to be made in their reduced circumstances?—Was there any

chance of buying back what they had sold to Lowe?

"We shall have to go quietly," said Len, "but I don't see why we shouldn't pull through if we're careful. I've given Boorman a week's notice. He can bump round here till it's up, and lend you a hand now and then—I don't suppose you'll tumble into things just at first."

Nigel suddenly turned away.

"I'm going out—to have a look round the place."

"Now!"

"Yes—it's a beautiful clear night."

Janet and Leonard moved towards the door.

"I'm going alone," said Nigel shortly.

Janet and Leonard stood still. They stared at each other, at first with surprise, then a little forlornly, while their brother pulled on his overcoat, and went out of the room.

Never, since they could remember, had one of the Furlongers preferred to be without the others.

It was past midnight, and Janet was not yet asleep. She lay in bed, with a lighted candle beside her, her hair tumbled over the pillow and over her body, her neck gleaming through the heavy strands.

Her room was full of warm splashes of colour. The bedspread and carpet, though faded, glowed with sudden reds and gentle browns—faded red roses were on the wall. The window was low, so that when she turned on the pillow she could look straight out of it at a huddled mass of woods. It

was uncurtained, and the stars flashed through the thick panes.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in"—and Nigel came in softly.

"Hullo, old man."

"I want to speak to you, Janey."

"And I want to speak to you. Come and sit on the bed."

"I—I want to say I'm sorry I cried this evening."

"Oh, don't!" gasped Janet.

"It's a habit one gets into in prison—crying about little things. Prison is made up of little things and crying about 'em—that's why it's so hellish."

Her hand groped on the coverlet for his.

"I expect I'll get out of it—crying, I mean—now I'm back."

"Don't let it worry you, old boy—we're pals, you and Len and I. But—but—don't you really like us talking to you about prison?"

He lifted his head quickly.

"It all depends."

"You see, there you were ragging and laughing about your clothes and your hair and all that. So how was I to know you'd mind——"

"But it's different. Oh, I don't suppose you'll understand—but it's different. Having one's clothes fumigated and one's hair cut short is a joke—it's funny, it's a joke, so I laughed. But being obliged to have everything exactly straight—every damned fork in its damned place——" he stopped suddenly and ground his teeth. "It's the

little things that are so infernal and degrading; big things one has to make oneself big to tackle, somehow, and it helps. But the little things . . . one just cries. Listen, Janey. Once a fortnight they used to come and search us in our cells. We used to stand there just in our vests and drawers, and they'd pass their hands over us. Well, I could stand that, for it was horrible—sickening and monstrous and horrible. But when you were punished just because your tins weren't in the exact mathematical space allotted to them—it wasn't horrible or monstrous at all, just childish and silly; and when a dozen childish and silly things crowd into your day, why, you become childish and silly yourself, that's all. What I can't forgive prison isn't that it's made me hard or wicked or wretched, but that it's made me childish and silly—so if I deserved hanging when I went in, I'm hardly worth spanking now I've come out."

"What I can't forgive prison is the miserable ideas you've picked up in it."

"There aren't any ideas in prison—only habits."

He hid his face for a minute in the coverlet. Janet's hand crept over his hair.

"You'll soon be happy again, old boy," she whispered.

"Perhaps I shall."

"I hope to God you will—and now, dear, it's dreadfully late, and you're tired. Hadn't you better go to bed?"

He turned to her impulsively.

"You'll stick to me, you and Len?—whatever

I'm like—even—even if I'm not quite the same as I used to be."

Strange to say, her impression of him was of an infinite childishness. She realised with a pang that while for the last three years she and Leonard had been growing older in their contact with a world of love and sorrow, this boy, in spite of all he had suffered, had merely been shut up with a few rules and habits. In many ways he was younger than when he first went to gaol, more ignorant and more childish—he had lost his grip of life. In other ways he was terribly, horribly older.

She put her arms around his neck, and kissed this pathetic old child, this poor childish old man.

CHAPTER II

SHOVELSTRODE

A ROW of lights gleamed from Shovelstrode Manor, on the north slope of Ashdown Forest. Shovelstrode was in Sussex, and looked straight over the woods into Surrey and Kent. Round it the pines heaped up till they gave a ragged edge to the hill behind it. Into the house they cast many shadows, and even when at night they were curtained out of the lighted rooms, one could hear them rustling and thrumming a strange tune.

Tony Strife crept up the back stairs to the schoolroom. She paused for a moment and listened to a distant buzz of voices. Her mother must be having visitors, so she would not go near her—she would sit in the schoolroom till it was time to dress for dinner. Tony was sixteen, healthy and clean-limbed, with a thick mouse-coloured plait between her shoulders. She wore a school-girl's blouse and skirt, with a tie of her school cricket-colours. She had in her manner all the mixture of confidence and deference which points to one who is paramount in her own little world, but is for some reason cast adrift in another where she has never been more than subordinate.

The schoolroom was in darkness. The fire was unlighted and the blinds were up, so that the shadows of the pines rushed over the square of moonlight on the floor, waving and gliding and curtseying in the wind. Tony, who had expected

drawn blinds and a cosy fireside, was a little dismayed at the dreariness of her kingdom. "I wonder if they got my postcard," she thought forlornly. But the schoolroom was the schoolroom, with or without a fire, and her own special province now that Awdrey had grown up, and exchanged its austere boundaries for a world of calls and dances and chiffons and flirtations. It was a little bit of the glorious land of school from which she had been so abruptly exiled. For the first time since her return a certain warmth glowed in her heart—she sat down on the window-sill and looked out at the pines.

She wondered how soon she would be able to go back to school. Perhaps there would be no more cases, and the dear, all-sufficient life would start again at the half-term. Meantime she would write every week to her three best friends and the mistress she "had a rave on," she would work up her algebra and perhaps get her remove into the sixth next term; and she would finish that beastly nightgown she had been struggling with ever since Easter, and be able to start a frock, like the rest of the form.

Her calculations were interrupted by the sound of footsteps in the passage and a rather strident voice calling—

"Tony! Tony!"

The next minute the door flew open, and a girl a few years older than herself burst in.

"Hullo!—so you *are* home! I saw your box in the hall, and swore you must have come back for some reason or other; but of course mother

wouldn't believe me. What on earth have you come for?"

"They've got whooping-cough at school, and Mrs. Arkwright sent us all home. Didn't mother get my postcard?"

"Postcard! of course not. We'd no idea you were coming, and your room isn't ready for you, or anything. You ought to have known better than to send only a card—they get kept back for days sometimes. And when you arrived, why didn't you come into the drawing-room and see mother, instead of sneaking up here?"

"I thought you had visitors—I could hear them talking. I meant to come down after I'd changed."

"I see. Well, you'd better come now and speak to mother. She's quite worried about your being here, or rather about my saying you're here when she says you aren't."

"Right-O!" and Tony followed her sister out of the room.

In a way Awdrey was like her, but with a more piquant, impertinent cast of features. She was dressed in the latest combination of fashion and sport, with a very short skirt to display her pretty ankles and purple silk stockings. She was strongly scented with some pleasant, flower-like scent, which, however, made Tony wrinkle up her nose with disgust.

"You were quite right about there being visitors," said the elder girl in a more friendly tone. "Captain le Bourbourg was here, and as only mother and I were in, I went with him to the door—complications, of course!"

"Ass," said Tony shortly.

Awdrey giggled, apparently without resentment, and the next minute they were in the drawing-room.

The drawing-room at Shovelstrode was an emasculate room, plunged deep in yellow and dull green. The furniture had a certain ineffectiveness about it, in spite of its beauty. The only thing which was neither delicate nor indefinite was the heavily beamed ceiling, reflecting the firelight. The girls' mother lay on a sofa between the fire and the half-curtained window, just where she could see the moon. She wore a yellow silk wrapper, and on her breast lay dull, strangely set stones. She was reading a little book of unorthodox mysticism, and others, in floppy suède bindings, were on the table beside her.

"Why, Antoinette!" she cried. "Whatever are you here for, child?"

"They had whooping-cough at school," said Awdrey glibly, "and sent her home—and the silly idiot wrote and told us on a postcard, which we'll probably get some time next week."

Lady Strife sighed.

"It's very disturbing, my dear, very disturbing —for me, that's to say. And as for your father, I expect he'll be furious. He hates things happening in a disorderly way and people being in the wrong place."

"I'm sorry," said Tony, "but I'll work all the time I'm here, so I really shan't lose anything by it."

"Well, it's not your fault, of course," rather

doubtfully. "Come and give me a kiss," she added, realising that the ceremony had been omitted.

"How are you, mother?"

"Oh, about the same, thank you. Weak of body, but not, I trust, weak of soul. I am wonderfully comforted by this little book of Sakrata Balkrishna's. Our soul, he says, Tony, sits within us as a watcher, holding aloof from the poor, suffering body, and weaving a new mantle of flesh for its next Manvantara."

"Buddhism? . . ." asked Tony awkwardly.

"Buddhism! My dear child—as if I would have anything to do with that modern corruption of pure Brahminical faith! No, Antoinette, this is the ancient Vedantin philosophy, as old as the world. By the way, has your box come?"

"Yes. I brought it with me in the taxi."

"The taxi! You were lucky to find one at the station."

"I didn't find it. A man got it for me from the Dorset Arms."

"A man!" cried Awdrey.

"Yes, quite an ordinary sort of man, but rather decent."

"I wonder who he was. How romantic, Tony!"

"Rats! It wasn't in the least romantic. When I got out of the station I found the car wasn't there to meet me, and all the cabs were gone, and I didn't know what to do. Then rather a nasty-looking man came along, and asked me what was the matter, and when I told him, he said I'd better spend the night in East Grinstead as it was so late,

and he knew of a very nice place I could go to. I didn't like to refuse, as he seemed so polite and interested, but of course I wanted to come here, and I was awfully glad when another man came and said he could get me a cab quite easily. The first man didn't seem to like it, though—perhaps he had some poor relation who let lodgings."

"Tony!' cried her sister. "You really mustn't go about alone. You're much too innocent."

"My darling child," wailed her mother, "my dove unsoiled by knowledge!"

Tony looked surprised, but her answer was checked by the sound of footsteps in the hall.

"Girls, there's your father!" cried Lady Strife. "Now, Tony, you will have to explain. And remember I hate a scene—it clogs my soul with matter."

"Right-O, mother!" and Tony hurried out into the passage.

Here she managed to get through the "scene," such as it was. Sir Gambier Strife was a man to whom time and place were all-important, and as the time of Term was inevitably linked with the place of School, he felt justly indignant at the separation of the two. "Whooping-cough! People were such milksops nowadays. When he was a boy the sooner one got whooping-cough the more one's relations were pleased. How old was Tony? Sixteen? Then the sooner she had whooping-cough the better."

This, however, was all said in rather a low voice, Sir Gambier realising as much as any one the

importance of not clogging his wife's soul with matter.

By the time he entered the drawing-room, he was talking of other things.

"I was down at Wilderwick this evening—you know that place at the bottom of Wilderwick hill, where the Furlongers live?"

"Yes. Sparrow Hall."

"That's it. Well, this evening there was a flag tied to the chimney. I asked old Carter what it was all about, and he said they're expecting the other brother home—the one that's been in gaol for the last three years."

"It's a long time since I've seen the Furlongers," said Awdrey, "they've been lying low for the last few months, and I don't think I've ever seen the one who's been in gaol."

"I saw him three years ago, just after we came here. He was swaggering about the Kent end of their land with his gun. He won't do much swaggering there in future. By Jove! it must have hit 'em hard to sell that property to old Lowe."

"They've only got a poky little farm now. But, father, do tell us what he's like, that youngest Furlonger—he sounds interesting."

"Oh, he wasn't much to look at—a great strong fellow, for ever showing his teeth. But I've been told he's got brains, plenty of 'em, wouldn't have landed himself in prison if he hadn't."

"When is he coming out?"

"They were expecting him this evening, I believe. Hullo! what's the matter?"

"Oh, it's suddenly struck me," cried Awdrey. "Perhaps he was Tony's man."

"Tony's man!—what d'you mean?"

Awdrey poured forth the story of her sister's adventure. "She said he was an awful-looking man, and goodness knows where he'd have landed her if the other man hadn't turned up and scared him away. I'm sure he must have been Furlonger, it isn't likely there'd be two scoundrels like that about."

Sir Gambier turned red.

"I won't have you girls mixed up in such things."

"She didn't want to be mixed up in it," interrupted Awdrey, "it wasn't her fault. But it's lucky the other man turned up. You don't know who he was, I suppose, Tony?"

"He said his name was Smith."

"That doesn't help us much. But, by Jove! how Furlonger must hate him!"

"We don't know he was Furlonger."

"He must have been; it's just the thing a ticket-of-leave convict would do—try to victimise an innocent-looking girl."

"I'm not innocent-looking!" cried Tony indignantly.

"Well, I shan't argue the point with you. You must have looked pretty green for him to have said what he did. By the way, what was Furlonger locked up for, father?"

"Something to do with the Wickham Rubber Companies. Farming wasn't good enough for him, so he took to finance—with the result that the

whole family was ruined; had to sell all their land, except a few inches round the house—and the young man got three years in gaol into the bargain."

"Wickham got ten—so Furlonger can't be as bad as Wickham."

"He's a rotten scoundrel, I tell you. Diddled thousands of respectable people out of their money. Then put up the most brazen defence—said that at the beginning he had no idea of the unsoundness of the scheme; 'at the beginning,' mark you—confesses quite coolly that he knew it was a fraud before the end."

"Well, I think it rather sporting of him," said Awdrey.

"He may have a beautiful soul," murmured Lady Strife; "why do people always look at actions rather than motives? Poor young Furlonger may have sinned more divinely than many pray. It's motive that makes all the difference. Motive may make the robbing of a till a far finer action than the endowing of a church."

"Tut, tut, my dear! What a thought to put into the girls' heads. Besides, it isn't as if the only thing against the Furlongers was that one of 'em's been in gaol. They're the most disreputable lot I ever met, don't care twopence for any one's good opinion."

"They're quite well connected really, aren't they?" said Awdrey.

"Yes, that's the worst of it. Their mother was a daughter of Lord Woodshire's, and I believe their father had rather a fine place near Chichester. But

he went to the bad—ahem! shocking story—died in Paris—tut, tut!—the children were left to shift for themselves, and bought Sparrow Hall with their mother's money—all the Chichester estate was chucked away by old Furlonger."

"I think they sound rather interesting. It's a pity the youngest should have embarked on the white slave traffic."

"White slave traffic!—hush, my dear. Young girls don't talk about such things."

"No—they get mixed up in 'em instead. Tony, I hope you'll meet your Mr. Smith again."

"He's not my Mr. Smith," said Tony hotly.

"Oh, it's impossible to talk to any one rationally to-night! Father's started on 'young girls,' and Tony's trying to make out she was born yesterday." She seized her sister by the arm. "Come upstairs and dress for dinner."

Tony was only too glad to escape, and they went up to widely different rooms.

Awdrey's was furnished with a telling combination of coquetry and sport. Silver toilet articles and embroidered cushions contrasted with her hunting-crop over the mantelpiece, her tennis racket on the wall. What struck one most, however, was the number of men's photographs which crowded the place. From frames of every conceivable fabric they stared with bold, glassy eyes. Awdrey smiled at them lovingly, as they woke either memory or emotion. She had once said that the male sex was roughly divisible into two groups—G.P.'s and H.P.'s—Grand Passions and Hideous

Pasts. Tony gave them a scornful glance as she passed the door.

Her own room was austere and white. An indefinable coolness haunted its empty corners and clear spaces. There were no photographs, as she had not yet unpacked the photographs of her girl friends which usually adorned the mantelpiece. There were only three pictures—a Memling Madonna, Holbein's Portrait of a Young Woman, and Watts' Sir Galahad, beloved of schoolgirls.

Tony sat down on the bed and began to unplait her hair.

"What a fool Awdrey is," she murmured to herself, "always thinking of love, and all that rot."

CHAPTER III

IN THE RAIN

FROM Nigel's bed as well as Janey's one could see woods, and in summer he had often lain listening to the night-jar in them—that mysterious whirring, dull and restless, as if ghosts were spinning.

That night all was windless silence, and there was no motion in the dark patch of window-view, except the flashing of the stars. Towards morning a delicious sense of cold stole over Nigel's sleep. Soft airs seemed to be baffing him, rippling round him, and there seemed to be water—water and wind. Then suddenly a bell rang in his brain. The dream collapsed, pulverised. He sprang up in bed, then scrambled out—then opened his eyes, to see himself still surrounded by his dream.

It was five o'clock, and the Parkhurst bell had rung in his head just as it had rung at that hour for hundreds of mornings. But he was not at Parkhurst, he was still in his dream—water and wind. Against the horizon stretched a long dim line of woods, and above them the sky was lucent with the first hope of dawn. Into the fields splashed a gentle rain, and in at his window blew the west wind, soft, damp and cold.

For the first time Nigel realised that he was home, and that he was free.

Yesterday had all been so strange, he had not had time to think of things. After years of confinement and discipline it had been a terrifying ordeal to walk through the crowded streets of a town and take a long train journey, involving several changes. He had wished then that he had allowed Len to come and meet him at Parkhurst—the dull fears that had made him insist on his brother coming no nearer than East Grinstead had seemed nothing to this terror of carts and horses and motors and trams and trains, these constantly shifting faces and strident voices, this hurry, this disorder, this horrible respect of people who called him "Sir," and said "I beg your pardon," if they fell over his big feet.

When he came to Sparrow Hall, it had been worse still—not at first, but afterwards, when Janet and Leonard had said all those terrible things to him, and hurt him so. They had hurt him, and he had frightened them, and it had all been miserable.

But this morning everything had changed. He no longer felt terrified of his independence or of what his brother and sister might say. His heart was warm and happy—his lungs were full of the sweet moist morning air.

He crossed the room. It was ecstasy to feel that no one was watching him, that there was no ugly observation hole in the door. Why, privacy was as sweet as independence, and not nearly so startling. He pulled off his sleeping-suit, and stood naked by the bed. For the first time in three years he felt the pride of his young manhood, the splendour of his body. The lust of life frothed up in his

heart. The dawn, his strong bare limbs, the rain, plunged him into a rapture of thanksgiving. He was home, and he was free.

He knelt down by the window, the rain spattering softly on him, and stared out at the woods —Ashplats Wood and Hackenden Wood and Summer Wood, with Swites Wood in the west. The woods, the dear brown wind-rocked woods!— he would walk in them that morning, there was on one to hinder him—he was home, and he was free among the woods.

He rose lightly, and began to dress. He put on old rough clothes that he had worn before he went to prison. They had been old then, and now they were positively disreputable, for Janet had folded them away carelessly, so that they had creased and frayed. But he loved them, they seemed even now to smell of the cows he had milked and the soft loam of the fields.

He ran downstairs whistling—some music-hall song that had been popular three years ago, but was long forgotten now. To Leonard in the yard and Janet in the dairy he sounded like a cheerful ghost. They both thought of going to meet him, but both at last decided to leave him alone.

The house was full of the delicious smell of rain, and the wind crooned through it tenderly, rattling the doors and windows, and fluttering the untidy rags of wall-paper that here and there hung loose on the walls. Nigel went into the kitchen, where the fire was burning. He sat down by it and warmed his hands, though he was not really cold. He had not seen a fire for three years.

Then suddenly he noticed something in the corner—it was his fiddle-case, wrapped in green baize. Nigel had always passed for something of a musician, and during a few stormy years spent in London with his father had been fairly well taught. Farming and scheming had never made him forget his fiddle, though occasionally it had lain for weeks as it lay now, wrapped up in dusty cloths in the corner.

He stooped down and took it out of its many covers. It was a fairly good instrument of modern make, best in its low tones. All the strings were broken except the G, but he found a coil of the D in the case, and screwed it on. By means of harmonics and the seventh position he could manage fairly well with two strings.

It seemed a terribly long time since he had felt a fiddle under his chin, and sniffed its peculiar smell of sweet varnished wood and rosin. He lifted his arm slowly, and the bow dropped on the strings. It was scratchy, and he felt horribly stiff, but in course of time matters improved a little, and Len and Janey, together in the Dutch barn, smiled at each other as the strains of Hamdel's "Largo" drifted out to them.

"He'll feel better now," said Leonard.

Nigel forgot the "Largo" in the middle, and started "O Caro Nome," from Rigoletto. His taste in music had always been the despair of his teachers. He had never seemed able to appreciate the modern school, or, indeed, the more advanced of the ancients. He had a desperate fondness for Balfe and Donizetti, for the most sugary moods of Verdi

and Gounod. He revelled in high notes, trills and tremolo—" O Caro Nome " and " I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls " appealed to a side of him which was definitely sentimental. He stood there by the window, swaying sentimentally from side to side, shaking shrill colorature from his violin, regardless of the squeaking of a nearly rosinless bow.

What appealed to Nigel was never the technique of a composition, but its emotional quality. Music was to him not so much sound as feeling—he did not value a piece for its own intrinsic beauty, but for the emotions it was able to call forth. As he played that morning whole cycles of experience passed before him. All the old dreams that for three years had lain dead in his violin now revived —but a new quality was added to them, a soft twang of sorrow. Before his imprisonment his dreams had been winged and shod with fire, wild things compounded of desire and endeavour, tender only in their background of the seasons' moods, rain and sunshine and wind and shadows and stars. But to-day longing took in them the place of endeavour, and all their desire was for forgetfulness. Stars and rain were in them still, but the stars and rain of the new heavens and the new earth which suffering had created—the rain which is tears, and the stars which spring from the dumb desire of sorrow brooding over the formless deep of its own immensity—" Let there be light." And there was light—one or two faint dream-like constellations, burning over and reflected in the swirling waters of the abyss. . . . A great wind passed

over the face of the waters, and parted them, and out of them rose a little island for a man to stand upon—so the dry land came out of the water. And the suffering man can stand on the island, where there is just room for his feet, and he can see the stars above him—and when he is too weary to lift his head he sees them reflected in the surging waters beneath. . . .

Nigel dropped his violin, and looked out with dream-filled eyes at the fields, seen dimly through the rain-drops dripping from the eaves. In the front garden stood a little girl—a little dirty girl with a milk-can.

"Hullo!" said Nigel.

He felt an unaccountable desire to talk to this child; not because he liked her particularly—indeed, she was rather an unattractive object—but because he realised suddenly that he was very fond of children. He had never known it before, never imagined that he cared about kids; but, whether it was his long exile in prison he could not tell, he felt quite overwhelmed this morning by his love for them, and realised that he absolutely must make friends with the highly unfavourable specimen before him.

"Hullo!" he repeated.

The maiden vouchsafed no reply.

"Have you come for the milk?" he asked conversationally.

She nodded. Then she pointed to his violin.

"Did the noise come out of that box?"

"Yes—would you like to hear it again?"

"No."

He was not to be daunted.

"Come in, and I'll show you a pussy."

"Is there a pussy in that box?"

"No—but there's a beauty in the chair by the fire."

Nigel dived out of the window, and caught her up bodily. Her clothes smelt strongly of milk and garden mould, not an altogether pleasing combination. But for some reason or other he felt delighted, and carried her in triumph round the kitchen before he introduced her to a large placid-looking cat.

"Don' like it."

This was humiliating, but Nigel persevered.

"Have some of this—" and he offered her a spoonful of jam out of the pot on the table.

The little girl sniffed it with the air of a connoisseur.

"Don' like it."

"Well, try this—" plunging the same spoon into the sugar basin.

"Don' like it."

Fortunately at that moment Janey came in.

"Nigel, what on earth are you doing?—Hullo, Ivy!"

She looked surprised at the scowling infant perched on her brother's shoulder.

"She's come for the milk, and I'm giving her some breakfast."

"Wan'er go 'ome!" shrieked Ivy.

Nigel looked so mortified that Janey could hardly help laughing—till suddenly she realised that there was something rather pathetic about it all. Nigel

CHAPTER IV

FATE'S AFTERTHOUGHT

JANET did not open her bill till her brothers had gone out to the farm. Then she tore the envelope. The bill ran—

"JANEY SWEET,

"Curse it!—I have to go to Brighton on Saturday. It's for my father, so I daren't object, in case he should ask too many questions. But I must see you, dear one—it's nearly a month since we met, and I'm dying for the sight of you and the touch of you. Can't you come to-day? I'm sure you can get away for an hour or two—your brothers must not take you from me. I'll be waiting in Furnace Wood, in the old place down by the hedge, at five. Come to me, Janey sweet. I dreamed of you last night—dreamed of you with your hands full of flowers.

"Your lover,

"QUENTIN."

Janey stuffed the letter into her pocket.

"It's dreadful of me," she repeated, in the same tone as she had said it to the boys. Those poor boys! How innocently and trustfully they had swallowed her lie—it was like deceiving children.

But she could not tell them—though Nigel's strange new reserve made her long all the more to be frank and without secret—they would be

furious if they knew her story, now the story of three years. Once she had tried hinting it to Len, but though he had not half understood her, he had made his feelings about Quentin Lowe pretty plain, and Janet had been only too glad to change the subject before the danger line was passed. Nigel would, of course, side with Leonard. They would look upon her love as treachery, for though there was no outward breach between the Furlongers and the Lowes, the former had always suspected the latter of sharp dealing over the Kent land—old Lowe would never have offered that absurd price if he had not known that the Furlongers were absolutely obliged to sell.

Old Lowe was a retired clergyman who had come with his son to Redpale Farm, just over the Kentish border. From the first he had cast a longing eye on the Furlonger acres, which touched his on the Surrey side. A row of cottages in obvious disrepair and insanitation had given his longing the necessary smack of righteousness. At that time Nigel was in prison on remand, and the news soon trickled through the neighbourhood that his brother and sister were in desperate money difficulties, and would have to sell most of their land. Lowe at once came forward with what he considered a fair offer, which the Furlongers, as no one else seemed inclined to bid, were bound to accept. The negotiations had been carried on chiefly through a solicitor, but young Lowe had paid two or three visits to Sparrow Hall.

Janet would never forget one of these. Leonard

was not in that day, but though she had told Quentin she could decide nothing without her brother, he had insisted on sitting with her in the kitchen, arguing some obscure point. She remembered it all—the table between them, the firelight on the walls, the square of darkness and stars seen through the uncurtained window, the pipe and rattle of the wind. He had risen to go, and suddenly she had seen that he was trembling—and before she had time to be surprised she saw that she was trembling too. They faced each other for a minute, shaking from head to foot, and dumb. Then they stooped together swiftly in a burning kiss, their hearts full of uncontrollable ecstasy and despair.

It had all been so sudden. She could not remember having felt the faintest thrill in his presence till that moment. He said the same. When he had sat down opposite her at the table, she had been merely a woman with whom he was doing business. It seemed as if fate had brought them together as an afterthought, and at first Janey believed it could not last. But it lasted. It had lasted all through those years, in spite of much wretchedness and a killing need for secrecy on both sides. This need was more vital for Quentin than for Janey. He was utterly dependent on his father, who, of course, looked on the Furlongers with righteous disgust. So for three years meetings had been stolen, letters smuggled, and happiness snatched out of sudden hours.

To-day Janet was not sure how she could arrange a meeting. Meetings with Quentin generally

needed the most careful planning, and on this occasion he had not given her much time. However, she thought, the boys would very probably go shooting in the early evening, and she could then run over to Furnace Wood.

This was what happened. A little manœuvring sent Nigel and Leonard out to pot rabbits, and a minute or so later Janey stole from Sparrow Hall, climbing the gate opposite into the fields of Wilderwick. She did not wear a hat—she never did—and over her dress was a disreputable old jacket. She went gaily and innocently to meet her lover in garments many women would not have swept the floor in.

It was a long tramp to Furnace Wood. The rain had cleared, but the grass was wet, and the trees shook down rain-drops and wet leaves. Autumn was late that year, still in the fiery stage —whole hedges flamed, and backgrounds were mostly yellow. But everywhere now were the dead leaves, damp as well as dead. Her feet splashed through them, they caked her boots, they filled every corner with their smell of sweet rottenness.

Furnace Wood marked the beginning of the chain of hammer ponds below Holtye Common. For a long time the fields had been sloping eastward, till at last they dropped into a tangled valley stretching from Old Surrey Hall to Sweetwoods Farm. Here was a great stillness and a great solitude—woods, and thick old orchards, with now and then an oast-house or a chimney struggling up among them. In this valley lay Redpale Farm,

Clay Farm, and Scarlet Farm, all old, alone, forsaken, beside the gleaming hammer ponds.

The waters of the first pond flashed like a shield through the half-naked branches of Furnace Wood. Janet's quick eyes saw Quentin standing by the hedge, and she began to run. She splashed over the drenched field, climbed the hedge with an agility she owed to a total disregard for her clothes —and crept warm and panting into his arms, as he stood there among the drifted leaves.

"Janey," he whispered, kissing her lips and her hair and her wrist wet with rain, "how I love you . . . little Janey sweet."

It pleased Quentin to call her little, though as a matter of fact she was considerably taller than he. Quentin was a few years younger than Janey —delicate-looking, and yet thick-set. His face was pale, though the features were roughly hewn, and his shoulders were so high as to give him almost the appearance of a hunchback. In spite of this, he often struck people as handsome in a strange way—which was due, perhaps, to a certain nobility in the casting of his face, with its idealistic mouth, strong nose, and great bright eyes, which seemed to be burning under his heavy brows.

"Janey," he continued, "you're beautiful to-day —you're part of the evening. There's rain on your hair, and on your cheek, so that when I kiss it I taste rain—you're brown and red, just like the fields, you're windswept and rumpled like the woods."

Janey laughed.

"And your teeth gleam like that white pond through the trees."

"You should put that into a poem, Quentin," she said, still laughing, "it sounds funny in prose."

"Prose! Prose!—as if there could be any prose when you are near!"

A copper gleam of sunlight came suddenly from under the rim of a leaden cloud. For a moment it flared on the hedge, making the wet leaves shine. It gave a metallic look to the evening—instead of sweetening the soaked landscape it seemed only to make it sadder, with a harsh, reckless sadness it had not worn in the gloom. Quentin put up his hand and picked one of the shining sprays, to fasten it in Janey's jacket. Whenever he saw beautiful things in the hedges, he wanted to give them to Janey. He never wanted to give her the beautiful things he saw in shops; he did not, like so many men, stare into shop windows, longing to see her in those clothes, those jewels, and great hats like the moon. But if ever he found a sudden splash of bryony in the hedge, or a flush of bloody-twig, or honeysuckle, or nuts, he wanted to pick them for her. When it was May he had often met her in Furnace Wood with his arms full of hawthorn, in June he had brought her dog-roses, in August ripe ears of barley, in September wild-apple boughs; and now in October he picked her sprays of red, sodden leaves. There was a little nut on this spray—he picked it off and cracked it with his teeth, and put the kernel into her mouth. Then suddenly the sunlight faded, and a soft rush of gloom swept up the valley of the hammer ponds.

"Nigel came home last night," said Janet, breaking the silence that had lasted with the sun.

"How is he looking?"

"He's changed, Quentin."

"It's aged him, of course."

"That isn't so terrible—we could have endured that, we'd expected it. The awful thing is that it's made him so childish. Sometimes you'd really think he was a child, by the way he speaks—and goes on."

"He'll soon be all right—you'll heal him, Janey."

"I don't see how I'm going to. The worst thing is that he's so reserved with me and Len. It isn't that he doesn't talk and tell us things, but I know he doesn't tell us the things that really matter. Oh, Quentin"—turning suddenly to him—"I feel such a wretch, having a secret from the boys when Nigel's like this."

"You've lost your logic, sweet—or, rather, thank God, you never had any. Your brother's secrets ought to make you worry less about your own."

"You don't understand—it's just the other way round."

She sighed deeply, and her pain irritated him.

"You have the power to end it if you like—you're not so badly off as I am. You can tell your brothers any day you choose—they can't interfere."

"Of course not—but it would make them miserable. They'd be miserable enough at the idea of my marrying any one, and leaving them—and as for marrying you——"

"Oh, I know they hate me," broke in Quentin. "And they despise me because I haven't got their health and muscle. They hate me for what I have got—their land; and they despise me for what I haven't got—their muscle."

Janet's eyes filled. She knew that he was wretchedly jealous of her brothers, and it hurt her more than anything else. She laid her hand timidly on his arm.

"Quentin, I wish you wouldn't feel that way towards the boys. I can't help loving them."

"But you love them more than me."

"I don't, indeed I don't. And you mustn't think they hate you. They've got their hand against every one, you know, and of course they feel sick about the Kent lands, there's no denying it. If they knew you loved me, they might hate you then—they'd be jealous; and if I told them now—oh, it would be all misery at home!—for them as well as for me. I'd far rather have my secret—that hurts only me. When we've settled anything definitely, of course I shall tell them. But we may have to go on like this for years."

Quentin groaned.

"Yes, Janey, that's true—that's the damned truth. You should never have loved a helpless fool like me, all tied up in paper and strings. Good Lord! my father will have something to answer for—if there's any one to answer to for our muddlings in this muddled hell."

"But you'll win your independence."

"Yes; if two things happen: if my father dies, which he isn't likely to, and which, hang it all, I

don't want him to—or if I can make enough by my writing to support two people, which is never done by pessimistic poets in this world of optimistic prose. I ought to hear from Baker soon—he's had that manuscript over a month—he's the twenty-eighth man that's had it. Oh, damn it all, Janey!"

They were sitting together on a tree-trunk under the hedge, the darkness creeping up round them. Quentin drew very close to Janey, and clutched her hand.

"I'm a beast to go whining to you like this—but it helps me. It's such a relief to get all my furies off my chest and feel your sympathy—*feel* it, Janey, you needn't speak, words seem to nail things down. Oh, why were you and I born into this muddle and never given a chance? I've never had a chance—not the shadow of one. All my life I've suffered that vile plague, dependence, and it's poisoned my blood and sapped my strength and perverted my reason. My father's to blame for it. The whole object of his life has been to keep me dependent on him. He's stinted me of everything—friends, money, education—just to keep me dependent. He's well off, as you know, but he allows me a miserable screw many tradesmen would be ashamed to offer their sons. He's made my bad health an excuse for cutting short my time at college, and for not bringing me up to any profession. He's in terror lest I should strike out a line for myself. He wants me to live my whole life on a negation—'thou shalt not,' he says. He dosen't say it because he's my father, but because he's a clergyman. It's that which has spoiled

him, because it hasn't let him go to life for his principles. Christianity never does. I hate Christianity, Janey—Christianity's a piece of Semitic bargaining—all Semitic religions are commercial, but Christianity has been so far Europeanised that it offers its rewards not for what you do but for what you don't do. I once wrote a poem on the Christian heaven—God and all the angels and curly-locked saints yawning their heads off because they're all so tired of doing nothing, and at last all falling asleep together. Ugh! One reason I love you, Janey, is that you're so beautifully pagan —just like the country here. The country's all pagan at bottom, and that's why every one loves the country, even the Christians."

Janey smiled, and pressed his hand. She knew Quentin liked "talking," so she let him "talk," though she troubled very little about the questions that were so vital to him. She knew it relieved him to pour into her ears the torrent of abuse which was always roaring against its sluices, and had no other outlet—unless it found its way into publishers' offices and damaged his poor chances there.

"It's Christianity which makes my father so damned clever in keeping me dependent," continued Lowe. "He's got so used to tying souls up in paper and string that he can make a neat parcel even of a bulky, bulgy soul like mine. You know how we admire shop people for the neat way they tie up parcels—we couldn't do it. Well, my father's a kind of celestial shop-keeper, and I'm

the goods he's sending out—payment on delivery. Oh, damn!"

Janey's hand went up to his face and stroked it. Quentin's furies always struck her as infinitely pathetic.

"It'll be all right, dear," she whispered. "I'm sure it will. You're bound to get free."

He seized her hand and held it fiercely in his while he stared into her eyes.

"Janey—I sometimes wonder if I'll ever get free—or if I do, whether I'll find freedom the ecstasy I imagine it. Perhaps freedom, like everything else, is a mirage, a snare, a disillusion. Yesterday I was reading the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—

> Gilgamesh, why dost thou wander around?
> Life which thou seekest thou canst not find.

That's the horrible truth—nothing that we seek shall we ever find, unless it's been found over and over again already. And then there's love, Janey, that's one of the things we never find, though we seek it till our tears are blood. I've written a poem about that, comparing love to the sea—to salt water, rather, for of course hundreds of poets have compared love to the sea. Love is like the salt water that splashes round the poor sailor dying of thirst—he drinks it in his desperation, and the more he drinks the fiercer becomes his thirst, and still he drinks on in despair and hope, till at last he ends in madness—that's love. Janey, that's love."

He stooped suddenly forward, till his head was buried in her knees.

"That's my love, sweet, sweet thing—my love for you. It never sates, it always burns, it tortures, it maddens. There is no rest, no rest in my love—it wakes me from my sleep to long for you—it is a hunger that gnaws through all my meals—it is a darkness that may be felt, a light too blinding to be borne . . ."

His shoulders shook, and tears rushed scalding into Janet's eyes. With one hand she stroked and tangled his coarse hair, the other he had seized and laid under his cheek—and she felt one burning tear upon it. Her whole heart seemed to open itself to her lover in tender pity, and not only to him, but to all men—men, with their fierceness in desire and gentleness in satiety, with their terrible sudden temptations, their weakness and nobleness, their beasthood and their godhead. Men struck her—had always struck her—as intensely pathetic; and now Quentin and his love wrung her breast with tears. Before that storm of hungry love she bowed her head in mute homage—she worshipped him as he lay there on her knees.

He lifted himself suddenly. Darkness was creeping fast into the woods, with little shivering gasps.

"Janey, before you go, there's something I want particularly to ask you. Next Tuesday week my father's going to London for the day. He won't be back till late—I want you to come to Redpale when he's gone."

"Redpale. . . . but there are the servants, Quentin."

"They're all right. I'll send the girls over to

Grinstead in the afternoon; there'll only be the men about the farm, and they needn't trouble us."

"But . . ."

"Oh, there's your brothers, of course," he cried harshly; "can't you get away from them for one afternoon?"

"Yes, I can. . . . I don't know why I said 'But.'"

"You mustn't say 'But'—Janey, do you realise that you and I have never had a meal together?"

"No."

"We must have a meal together—I want to see you eat—I want to drink with you."

"Very well, I'll come. I'll get over early in the afternoon. . . . Now I must say good-bye."

"When I see you next I may have heard from Baker. Then we shall know our fate."

"Our fate . . .?"

"Yes, for if Baker can't take my stuff, no one else will, and my last chance is gone."

"Don't think of such a thing, dear."

"No, I won't. I'll think of you, dream of you—whenever you are so gracious as to let me sleep."

He stood up, and drew her head down to his shoulder, holding it there with trembling hands, while his lips sought her face. Her mouth was against his sleeve, and she kissed it while he kissed her cheek and neck. For a full minute they stood together thus, and when they drew apart, the first star hung a timid candle above the burnt-out fires of the west.

CHAPTER V

THE HERO

OCTOBER dropped from red to brown in a sudden night of rain, and the Three Counties began to draw over themselves their fallow cloaks of sleep. In every view the ploughed fields spread brown and wet and empty, some with a ruddy touch of Kentish clay, others with a white gleam of Surrey chalk.

Nigel flung himself into the farmyard toil, and complained because it was too scanty. Their ten acres of grass and orchard, with three or four cows and some poultry, did not give nearly enough work, he thought, to two able-bodied men. He remembered the days when the acres of Sparrow Hall had rolled through marsh and coppice into Kent—when fifteen sweet-mouthed cows had gathered at the gates at milking-time, and golden rye from their high fields had gone in their waggon to Honey Mill. He was miserably aware that he had no one but himself to blame for this, though his brother and sister never reproached him. He had been impatient of the slow bounties of the fields, he had plunged into quick, adventurous dealings; for a few months he had brought wealth, hurry and excitement into his life—then had come poverty, and the ageless monotony of prison.

When he looked round on their reduced estate it was not so much humiliation that ate into his heart as a sense of treachery. He had betrayed

the country. Impatient of its slow, honest ways, he had sought others, crooked, swift, defiled. He had turned renegade to the quiet fields round his home, and entered a rival camp of reckless strivings and meanness. This had been his sin, and he was being punished for it still. The punishment of the State for his sin against the State was over . . . but the punishment for his sin against his home, the country, and himself was still being meted out to him by all three.

The high spirits that had seized him on that first rainy morning of his freedom often came and snatched him up again, but they always dropped him back into a depression that was almost horror. He had moments of crazy gaiety and uproariousness, of sheer animal delight in his bodily freedom; but behind them all lurked the consciousness that he was still in prison. He had been sentenced for life. He was shut up in some dreary place, away from the farm, away from Len and Janey. He might work on the farm the whole day, and fool with his brother and sister the whole evening, but he knew none the less that he was shut up away from them all.

During this time he had peculiar dreams. He often fell asleep full of fury and despair, but his dreams were always of sunlit spaces, children and flowers. Again and again in them appeared the little girl Ivy—not dirty and cross, but lovely and fresh and winsome, smiling and beckoning. It seemed as if behind all the horrors and fogs of his life something divine and innocent was calling—

at times it was comfort and peace and healing to him, at others it was the chief of his torments.

The Furlongers had always lived aloofly at Sparrow Hall—scorned, even before their downfall, by their own class, they had nevertheless not sought comrades in the classes beneath them. They had always sufficed one another, and had not cared for the distractions of over-the-fence gossip or the public-house.

However, since his return from Parkhurst, Nigel had realised a certain tendency on the part of labourers and small farmers to seek him out and claim equal terms. This was not merely due to the consciousness of his degradation, the delight of patronising the proud Furlonger—its chief motive was a strange sort of deference. Socially, his crime had reduced him to their level, but morally it had given him an exaltation which had never been his before. He now belonged to that world of which they caught rare dazzling glimpses in their Sunday papers. He was only a rank below Crippen in their hero-worship, and when they met him in the village they stared at him in much the same way as they stared at the murderer's photograph in *The People*.

At first Nigel hung back from them, sick and confused with shame, but as the days went by, the emptiness of his life beat him into conciliation. Humiliated to the dust, he longed for some sort of regard, however spurious, just as a starving man will eat dung. His brother and sister gave him love and kindness in plenty, but they were

much too practical in their emotions any longer to give him deference. Before he went to prison he had been, though the youngest, the leader of the family—his stronger brain, his quicker wits had made him the captain of their exploits. But now his brain and wits were discredited. Len and Janey did not despise him, they were not ashamed of him before men—but he had forfeited his position in the household. They no longer looked upon him as their superior, he was just the younger brother. At first he had scarcely noticed this—everything had been strange, and he had let slip former realities. But as the days went by, and Parkhurst became more and more of a horrible and suggestive parenthesis, he was able to recall the old ways and see how things had changed. He made no complaint, but his spirit was chafed, and sought crazily for balms.

"Come, don't be stand-offish, Mus' Furlonger," said the shepherd of Little Cow Farm, who, meeting him outside the Bells at Lingfield, had suggested a drink.

"No, you're a better man than me now—aren't you?" said Nigel, showing his teeth.

"I wurn't hinting such, Mus' Furlonger—only t'other chaps in there do want to hear about the prison."

"Why?"

"Oh, it's always interesting to hear about prison—specially from chaps wot has bin there. We git a lot about 'em in *Lloyd's* and *The People*, but there's nothing like a fust-hand story—surelye!"

Nigel laughed crudely.

"And it's a treat to meet a real convict—none of your petty larceny and misdemeanour fellers. . . ."

"Well, here's greatness thrust upon me," said Furlonger, and swaggered into the bar.

The fuggy atmosphere affected him in much the same way as the smell of ether and dressings affects a man entering a hospital—the spirit of the place, assisted by crude outward manifestations, cowed him and made him its slave.

"Name it," said the shepherd.

"Porter."

It was three years since he had had a really stiff drink. He had never cared for liquor, indeed he had always been a man of singularly temperate life, a spare eater, a water drinker. But to-day a sudden desire consumed him—not only to drink, but to be drunken. He remembered the one occasion on which he had been drunk. It was the day he had known definitely of the collapse of Wickham's scheme, and his own inevitable disgrace. He had sat in the kitchen at Sparrow Hall, drinking brandy till his head had fallen forward on the table and his legs trailed back behind his chair. Afterwards, there had been a shameful waking, but he could never forget how peace had crept in some mysterious physical way up his spine, from the base of his neck to his brain, with a soft tingling—it had been purely physical at first, then it had passed on to mental dulling and dimming.

To-day, as the frothy brown porter ran down his throat, he felt that gracious tingling, that

creeping upwards of relief. He looked round the bar. It was full of labouring men and small-holders, who stared at him with round eyes that were curious and would be ingratiating—they wanted to know him, because in their opinion he was better worth knowing than before he went to gaol.

"This is Mus' Breame of Gulledge," said the Little Cow shepherd. "How are you, Mus' Breame?—This is Mus' Furlonger of Sparrow Hall."

Mus' Breame held out a dark and hairy hand. Nigel's lips were twitching. Somehow he felt much more humiliated by the beery approval of these men than by the cold looks of their betters. However, he gave his short, dry laugh, and shook hands.

"And here's Mus' Dunk of Golden Compasses, and Mus' Boorer of Kenthouse Hatch—this here is old Adam Harmer, as has been cowman at Langerish this sixty year."

Nigel had seen all the men before, and had once sold a calf to Adam Harmer, but he realised that now he was meeting them on new terms.

"I wur wunst in the lock-up meself for a week," drawled old Harmer. "'Twas summat to do wud poaching, but so long ago as I forget 'xactly wot. Surelye!"

"Reckon prisons have changed unaccountable since your day," said Dunk, throwing a glance at Nigel, as if to show that an opening had been tactfully made for him. But Harmer clung to speech.

"Reckon they have: surelye. In my days you'd hemmed liddle o' whitewash and all that—it wur starve and straw and bugs in my day, and two or three fellers together in a cell, either larkin' or murderin' each other."

The Little Cow shepherd looked uneasily at Furlonger.

"Yus—and the constables too, so different. Not near so haughty as they is now, but comfortable chaps, as 'ud let yer see yer gal fur a drink, and walk out o' the plaace fur half a sovereign."

The conversation was obviously getting into the wrong hands. The only person who looked interested was Nigel.

"Reckon all that's changed now," hastily put in Dunk—"they say now as gaol's lik a hotel—but not so free and easy, I take it, not so free and easy. Name it, Mus' Furlonger—see your glass is empty."

This time Nigel named a brandy.

"Reckon you can't order wot you lik fur dinner—and got to do your little bit o' work. But the gaol-buildings themselves, they're just lik hotels, they're palisses—handsomer than a workhouse."

"They're damned stinking hells," said Nigel—the brandy had loosed his tongue.

A murmur of approval ran through the bar. The great Furlonger had at last been drawn into the conversation. He sat at a small table, his fingers round his empty glass—about half a dozen voices begged him to "name it."

At first he hesitated. He was now a hero—for the first time for years—and yet it was a hero-

worship he could not swallow sober. But he wanted it. He wanted to be looked up to, for a change—to be deferred to, and exalted; and if he could not stand it sober, he must get drunk, that was all. He named another brandy.

The patrons of the bar were drawing round him. The barmaid was patting and pulling at her hair; even "Charley," the seedy nondescript that haunts all bars, and, unsalaried and ignored, brings the dirty glasses to the counter from the outlying tables —even "Charley" came forward with a deprecating grin and heel-taps of stout.

Nigel had gulped down the brandy, and, without exactly knowing why, had sprung to his feet.

"Give us a speech, Mus' Furlonger!" cried Boorer of the Kenthouse. "Tell us about gaol, and why it's damned and stinking."

"Have something to cool you fust," suggested Breame.

Nigel shook his head. He was in that convenient state when a man is sober enough to know he is drunk.

"Gaol's damned and stinking," he began, glaring sharply round him, "in the same way that this bar is damned and stinking—because it's full of men. But in gaol they're divided into two classes, top scoundrels and bottom scoundrels. The top scoundrels are the warders, with their eye at your door, and their hand inside your coat—in case you've got baccy."

A murmur of sympathy ran through his listeners, who had been a little taken aback by his opening phrases.

"Baccy's one of the things you aren't allowed. There's lots of others—drink, and girls, and your own body and soul—the body your mother gave you, and the soul God gave you," he finished sententiously with a hiccup.

Some one thrust another glass into his hand, and he gulped it down. It burnt his throat.

"I once had a body, and I once had a soul, but they aren't mine any longer now. They belong to the state—hic—they're number seventy-six—that's me who's speaking to you—number seventy-six—no other name for three yearsh . . . go and see the p'lice every month—convict seventy-six . . . made me no better'n a child—hic—what'er you to do with a man when he's got too clever for you?—turn him into a child—a crying child—a damn crying child—like me——"

And Furlonger burst into tears.

The bar looked disconcerted. Nigel stood leaning up against the table, sobbing and hiccuping. The barmaid offered him her handkerchief, which was strongly scented, and edged with lace. Breame muttered—"We're unaccountable sorry, Mus' Furlonger," and Dunk suggested another brandy.

Suddenly Nigel flung round on them, his lips shrinking from his teeth, his eyes blazing.

"Damn you!" he cried thickly—"damn you all—you cheap cads—gaping and cringing and pumping—feeding on my misery and my shame—hic . . . look at you all grinning . . . you're pleased because I'm in hell. You'll go home and gas about me, and say 'poor fellow'—blast you!

—I'm better than anything in *Lloyd's* or the *News of the World*—hic—let me go—you're dirt, all of you—let me go——"

He plunged forward, and elbowed his way through them to the door. He was very unsteady, and crashed into the doorpost, bruising his forehead. But at last he was out in the sun-spattered afternoon—with a cool breeze bringing the scent of rain from the forest, and little clouds flying low.

CHAPTER VI

THICK WOODS

WHEN Len and Janey came in from the yard that evening they found Nigel in the kitchen, sitting at the table scowling. His hair was damp on the temples, and his cheeks were flushed.

"Hullo, old man!" cried Janey, "when did you come in?"

He did not answer, but supplemented his scowl by a grin. It was characteristic of him to scowl and grin at the same time.

Len went up to his brother, and looked at him closely and rather sternly.

"What have you been up to?"

Still Nigel did not speak. Then suddenly he dropped his head, rolling it on his arms.

"Is he drunk?" whispered Janey.

"What d'you think?"

Len tried to pull up his brother's head, but Nigel growled and shook him off.

"Nigel!" cried Janey.

He made no answer.

She tried to slip her hand under his forehead, and lift it.

"Nigel, what have you been doing?"

He snarled something at her, and she remembered the other awful occasion when she had seen her brother drunk.

"Leave him alone, and he'll come to himself," said Len. "It's natural for him to get drunk—he's the sort."

"Oh, no, he isn't!—Nigel, come upstairs with me, and let me put something cool on your head."

"Damn you!" growled the boy, "leave me alone."

"Oh, Nigel, don't hate me—I'm not blaming you—I think I know why you got drunk, and I——"

Her sentence was never finished. With a yell of fury he sprang to his feet, knocking over his chair, and seized her in a grip of iron.

"Hold your tongue, you ——!"

"Oh!" cried Janet.

Leonard vaulted across the table, grasped his brother's collar, and struck him on the side of the head. Nigel loosed his grip of Janet, and turned to close with Len, who was, however, much the better man of the two. He forced Nigel down on the table, and proceeded to punish him with all his might.

"Apologise, you brute . . . beg her pardon on your knees," he shouted.

Nigel did not speak—his lips were tight shut, a thin red streak in the whiteness of his face.

"Len . . . stop!—you'll kill him!" cried Janet. She stood petrified, trembling from head to foot. Never in her whole life had she witnessed such a scene in the Furlonger family. The boys were fighting. She had seen them spar before, but never anything like this. And Nigel's drunkenness . . . and his words to her . . . a sickly, stifling horror crept up her throat and nearly choked her.

"Len—stop!—he's had enough."

"Not till he apologises—apologise, you damn brute!"

Nigel's teeth were set. He struggled mechanically, Len had hold of his right wrist, and his left hand was bent under him. Suddenly, however, he managed to wrench them both free—the next minute he seized his brother's throat. For a moment or two they struggled desperately, Leonard half strangled, and in the end Nigel rolled off the table to the floor, where both young men lay together.

Leonard was the first to rise.

"Good Lord, Janey," he said weakly.

"Nigel—he's dead."

"Not he!"

They both knelt down, and raised him a little. Blood began to run out of the corner of his mouth.

"You've killed him!" cried Janey.

"No—he's only bitten his tongue. Look"—lifting the corner of his brother's lip—"his teeth are locked like a vice."

"Oh, all this has been too horrible!"

"Run and fetch some water—we'll bring him to in a minute."

She filled a jug at the tap, and together they bathed Nigel's forehead and neck. Len's rage had entirely cooled, and he handled his unconscious brother almost tenderly.

At last the boy opened his eyes. To the surprise of both Len and Janet his first glance was quite mild.

"Oh . . ." he said weakly.

Then suddenly remembrance seemed to come.

He shook off his brother's hand, scowled at Janey, and struggled to his feet.

"I'm going to bed," he muttered, leaning unsteadily against the table.

"You mustn't stand," said Janet, trying to soothe him, "come and sit here for a minute, and then Len shall help you up to bed."

"I don't want Len, damn him!"

He staggered towards the door.

"Len—go after him."

"Not if I know it."

"He'll never get upstairs without you."

"He's much better alone."

They heard Nigel slipping and stumbling on the stairs. Once he fell with a crash, but at last he reached the top. Luckily his door was open, and he lurched in. The next minute they heard a thud and a creak as he flung himself on the bed.

He woke at dawn from what seemed an eternity of sleep—not one of those swift, deep sleeps which we are unconscious of till we find their healing touch on our lids at waking, but a series of sleeps, heavy, yet tossed, continually broken by grey glimmers of consciousness, by sudden heats and pains, quick stabs of memory, blind spaces of forgetfulness—that feverish, aching forgetfulness, which is memory in its acutest form.

He sat up in bed, his temples throbbing, his face flushed and damp. He pushed his hair back from his forehead, and stared out at the morning with eyes that burned. He fully remembered all that had happened, without such reminders as his

headache, his sickness, and the rumpled clothes in which he had slept all night. His brain throbbed to the point of torture. Sharp cuts of pain tore through it, hideous revisualisations seemed to scorch whole surfaces of it with sudden flames. Facts hammered at it with monotonous mercilessness.

He fell back on the pillow, and for some minutes lay quite still, staring out at the woods. There they lay in their straight brown line, those woods. He could almost hear the rock of the wind in them, creeping to him over the stillness of the fields. They seemed to whisper peace—peace to his throbbing pulses and burning skin and aching body and breaking heart. All his universe was shattered, except those quiet external things—the woods and fields round his home. They stood unchanged through all his turmoils, they responded only to their own remote influences—the warming and cooling of winds, the waxing and waning of the sun's heat, the frostiness of vapours. He might rage, despair, scream, and curse in them without changing the colour of one leaf.

He longed stupidly for tears, but those easy tears of his humiliation would not come. He felt that if he thought of Len and Janey he might cry. But he would not think of them, though in his heart was an infinite tenderness. Len and Janey were like the woods, they did not change—then suddenly he realised that nothing had changed, it was only he. He had changed, and could not fit in with his old environment. Curse it! Damn it! Where could he find peace?

Perhaps he had formally renounced peace on that day he plunged his hands into the pitchy mess of money-making. He had known peace before then—soft dreams that flew to him from the lattices of dawn. He remembered days when he had lain in the corner of some field, among the rustling hay-grass, his soul lost in the eternities of peace within it. But now—he had renounced peace. He had turned from pure things to defiled —and he had sharpened his brain, whetted it on artificialities. For the man with brains there is seldom peace, but an eternal questing. The man without brains suffers only the problem of "what?" It is the man with brains who has to face the seven-times hotter problem of "why?"

Why was a man, alone of all creatures, allowed to be at war with his environment—a prey to changes that were independent of, and unable to reproduce themselves in, the world around him? Why was a man the meeting-place of god and brute, the battle-ground of the two with their unending wars?—and so made that if one should triumph and drive out the other, the vanquished, whether god or brute, took away part of his manhood with him, and peace was won only at the price of incompleteness? . . . Why was consummation only a prelude to destruction?—the lustreless horns of the daylight moon seemed to be telling him that it waxed full only to wane. Why was a man given desires that were gratified only at their own expense? Why did his young blood call—call into the fire and dark—with only the fire and dark to answer it?

It was in this turmoil of "whys" that Nigel's longing for the woods became desperate. He raised himself on his elbow, and stared out at them—Swites Wood, Summer Wood, and the woods of Ashplats and Hackenden. He found himself dreaming of their narrow, soaking paths, of their brown undergrowth, and carpet of dead leaves—he seemed to see the long rows of ash, with here and there a yellow leaf fluttering on a bough. He would go to the woods, he would find rest in their silent thickness.

He sprang out of bed and across the room, with what seemed one movement of his big, graceful body. He lifted his water-jug from the floor, and drank deeply—then he washed himself and put on fresh clothes. He felt clean and cool, and the mere physical sensation gave him new strength and dignity. He went quietly downstairs. Len was up and in the yard, Janet was in the kitchen—but neither saw him as he stole out of the house and up the lane.

He left it soon after passing Wilderwick, and plunged into a field. The grass was covered with frost-crystals, beginning to melt in the lemon glare of the sun. It was a strange, yellow dawn, dream-like, pathetic—a little wind fluttered with it from the east, and smote the hedges into ghostly rustlings. Nigel crept through the pasture as if he feared to wake some one asleep, and entered the first of his woods.

The rim was touched with flame—one or two fiery maples blazed out of the hedge against a background of yellow. Creeping through those

golds and scarlets into the sober browns was symbolic. He went a few steps, then flung himself down upon the leaves. On the top they were dry, underneath he felt and smelt their gracious dampness.

The fires in his heart seemed to die. He felt bruises where Len had struck him, but they galled him no longer; the half-forgotten peace and liberty of other days was beginning to drift like a shower into his breast. Why could he not live always in the woods, instead of among people whom he hurt and who hurt him, though he loved them and they loved him? There was no love in the woods—love had passed out of them in September, leaving them very quiet, very peaceful, in a great brown hush of sleep. Love was what hurt in life—love and brains; take away these and you take away suffering. Oh, if love and thought could go together out of his life as they had gone out of the woods—and leave him in a great brown hush of sleep.

For nearly an hour he lay in the brake, hidden by golden tangles of bracken and stiff clumps of tansy. He had begun to drowse, and capture rags of happiness in dreams, when suddenly he heard a rustling in the bushes. Hang it all! He could not have peace, even in the woods. The rustling came nearer, and he heard the panting of a dog—with a mumbled oath he sat up in the fern.

"Oh! . . ."

Nigel's head and shoulders were not a reassuring sight to confront one suddenly on a lonely

woodland walk, and though Tony did not scream her voice was full of alarm. At first Nigel did not recognise her, she stirred up in him merely impersonal feelings of annoyance, but the next moment he seemed to see her face in a glow of lamplight on East Grinstead platform. This was the lone girl-kid he had befriended—and thought no more of since then.

"I beg your pardon," he said hastily, scrambling to his feet, "I'm afraid I startled you."

"Oh, no"—she looked awkward and embarrassed. "You're Mr. Smith, aren't you?"

Nigel stared at her in some bewilderment, then suddenly remembered another of the half-forgotten incidents of that night.

"Yes—I'm Smith," he said slowly. "I—I hope you got home all right in the taxi."

"Quite all right, thank you—and mother said I ought to be very grateful to you for taking such care of me."

There was something about this school-girl, who evidently took him for a man of her own class and position, which filled him with an infinite pain—a pain that was half a wistful pleasure. She stood before him in the path, a slim, unripe promise of womanhood, her long hair plaited simply on her back, her face glowing with health, her eyes bright and shy. He felt unfit, uncouth—and yet she did not seem to see anything strange in his appearance, sudden as it had been. He realised that now at last he was face to face with a human being between whom and him the barrier of his disgrace did not stand. This child did not exalt

him for his evil story, neither did she despise him —his crime simply did not exist. Its hideousness was not tricked out with tinsel and scarlet, as by the cads in the bar—it was just invisible, put away. Strange words thrilled faintly into his mind—" the remission of sins."

" I'm glad you came to me at East Grinstead," said Tony, a little embarrassed by the long pause. " You see, mother never got my postcard, so no wonder there wasn't any one to meet me."

" I'm glad I was any use." He spoke stiffly, in a mortal fear lest, for some reason unspecified, her attitude of fragrant ignorance should collapse.

" Do you live near here? " she asked naïvely.

He hesitated. " Not very."

" I do—quite near. I think I must be going home now."

She held out her hand to say good-bye, when suddenly a shrill wailing scream rose from the field outside the wood.

" Oh! " cried Tony.

They both turned and listened, their hands still clasped. The next minute it came again—shrill, frantic.

" What is it? " asked the girl, shuddering, " it sounds just like a baby."

" I think it's a rabbit—perhaps it's caught in a trap."

He left hold of her hand and looked over the hedge. The next minute he sprang into it, forcing his way through, while she stared after him with troubled eyes.

"Yes, it's a rabbit," he cried thickly, "caught in one of those spring traps, poor little devil!"

She scrambled after him into the field.

"Oh, let it out!—poor little thing!—oh, save it!"

But he was already struggling with the trap, and she saw blood on his hands where the teeth had caught them.

"I'll do it, never fear," he muttered, grinding his teeth. "Can you hold the poor little chap?—He'll hurt himself worse than ever if he struggles so."

She grasped the soft mass of fur, damp and draggled with its agony, while Nigel tried to prise open the steel jaws.

"There!"

The rabbit bounded out of the trap, but the next minute fell down struggling.

"It's leg's broken," cried Nigel. "Poor little beast!—what a damned infernal shame!"

He picked it up tenderly.

"Hadn't you better destroy it?" asked Tony, gulping her tears.

"I think perhaps I had—look the other way."

She moved off a few steps, and heard nothing till Nigel said, "Poor little beggar!"

He came up to her, holding the dead rabbit by its ears.

"That's all you're good for when you've been in a trap—to die. Being in a trap breaks parts of you that can never be mended. It's always kind to kill broken things."

He stood hesitating a moment, then suddenly

he flushed awkwardly, pulled off his cap and turned away.

Tony stared after him. She saw him go with bowed head across the field. Half way he dropped the rabbit, but he did not stop. He walked straight to the fence, and climbed over it into the lane.

An impulse seized her—she could not account for it, but she suddenly turned to follow him. She wanted to thank him again, perhaps—to ask him something, she scarcely knew what. But he was gone. There was only the dead rabbit, lying still warm in the grass.

CHAPTER VII

OVER THE GATES OF PARADISE

THE next day was the day Janet had promised to have tea with Quentin at Redpale Farm. She had prepared for it carefully, telling her brothers she was going shopping in East Grinstead, and would not be home till late.

As soon as dinner was over, she slipped upstairs to dress. She was in a state of fever, and for the first time thought of her clothes. She had never troubled about them when she went to meet Quentin in the woods, but now she was going to his house—a thrill ran through her; she had never in her life been inside Redpale Farm, but now she would see the room where Quentin sat and thought of her in the long, dark evenings—which he had told her of so often—when the stars crawled through veils of wrack, and the wind piped down the valley of the hammer ponds.

Memories of his few pronouncements on clothes rose to guide her. He liked her to come to him as a fragment of the day on which he waited. To-day was a brown day, hiding under rags of mist from a pale, sun-washed sky—so she put on a brown dress, of a long-past fashion, and mended in places, but beautiful in clinging folds about her—and in her breast she pinned the last yellow rose of the garden.

"Good-bye, Janey," called Len from the orchard.

"Good-bye," sang out Nigel.

She waved her hand to them, not trusting herself to speak.

As soon as she was out of sight, she climbed into the fields, and walked across them to Old Surrey Hall. Here were the tangled borders of Kent—she plunged through a hedge of elder and crack-willow, and was in the next county. Quentin always used to say that there was a difference between the three counties, even where they touched in this corner. Surrey was park-like, and more sophisticated than the other two; one had wide, green spaces and dotted trees. Sussex was moor-like, covered with wild patches and pines, hilly and bare; Kent was untidy, tangled and lush, full of small, twisting lanes, weighted orchards and huddled farms. Janet passed the flat gable-end of Anstiel, buried in the thickets of its garden, and came out on the Gated Road. This wound down the valley of the hammer ponds to Redpale, Scarlets and Clay. It was seldom used, as there were gates every few hundred yards to prevent the cattle from straying, and in winter the hammer ponds sometimes overflowed.

Redpale was the first of the valley farms, and stood in a reed-grown hollow beside a wood. It was an old house, with a carnival of reds in its huge, sloping roof. Janet stole quickly through the yard and came up the garden to the door. It was opened before she reached it, and Quentin seized her hands.

"You've come at last—I've been watching for you."

He dragged her into the passage, banged the door, and kissed her in the dark.

"Come into the study," he cried eagerly. "Come and hallow me a hundred lonely evenings in one hour."

He took her into a low, book-lined room, where a fire was burning. A chair was pulled up to the fire, and over it was spread a gorgeous Eastern rug.

"You're to sit there, Janey. I prepared that rug for you—it has your tintings, your browns and whites and reds. Sit down, and I'll sit at your feet."

She sat down, but before he did so, he fetched a jug of chrysanthemums, and put them on the table beside her.

"Now you're posed, Janey sweet—posed for me to gaze at and worship. You don't know how often I've dreamed of you in that chair, with old oak at your back, flowers at your elbow, and firelight in your eyes. One night I really thought I saw you there, and I fell at your knees—as I do now—and took your hand—as I do now. But it was only a dream, and I sat on in my own chair and watched our two fetches sitting there before me, you in the chair and I at your feet."

He kissed her hands repeatedly, and his poor, hot kisses seemed to drain love and pity in a torrent from her heart.

"Quentin, I'm so glad I came. Is this where

you sit in the evenings? Now I shall know how to imagine you when I think of you after supper."

"'When you think of me after supper'—you quaint woman! how funnily you speak!"

He laughed, and hid his face in her knees. But the next moment his head shot up tragically.

"I've bad news for you, dear."

"Oh, what is it? . . ."

"Baker has returned my poems."

"Oh! . . ."

"Yes—there they are."

He pointed to the grate, where one or two fragments of charred paper showed among the cinders.

She bowed her face over his.

"I thought you were happy when I came."

"Happy! of course I was happy *when you came*. Janey, if you come to me on my death-bed, I'll be happy—if you come to me in hell, I'll sing for joy."

"Did Baker write about the poems?"

"No—only a damned printed slip; he doesn't think 'em worth a letter. It's all over with me, Janey—with us both. I'll never be good for anything—I'm a rotter, a waster, a Spring Poet. We're both done for—our love isn't any more use."

"Can't you hope, dear?"

"Can you?"

She began to cry.

She had always fought hard against tears when she was with Quentin, but this afternoon her disappointment was too bitter. She realised the sour facts to which hope and trust had long blinded

her—that Quentin would never win his independence, and therefore that marriage with him was impossible till his father's death. She saw how much she had unconsciously relied on Baker's acceptance of the poems, their last hope. Quentin's words had scattered a crowd of little delicate dreams, scarcely realised while she entertained them, known only as they fled like angels from the door. After those three weary years of waiting she had dreamed of being his at last—his wife, his housemate—no longer meeting him in the dark corners of woods, but his before the world, honoured and acknowledged. Now that dream was shattered—the three weary years would become four weary years, and the four, five—and on and on to six and seven. The woods would still rustle with their stealthy footsteps, their tongues still burn with lies . . . she covered her face, and wept bitterly—with all the impassioned weakness of the strong.

"Oh, I'm so ashamed. . . ."

"Why?"

"Because I'm crying. But, Quentin, I feel broken, somehow. Our love's so great, and we're parted by such little things."

"Janey, Janey. . . ."

She sobbed more dryly now—anguish was stiffening her throat.

"Must we wait all those years?" he whispered.

"What else can we do?"

He whispered again. "Must we wait all those years?"

She lifted her face, understanding him suddenly.

"Quentin, you and I must do nothing to—degrade our love."

"But it's degraded already—it's thwarted, and all thwarted things are degraded. If we fling aside our fears and triumph over circumstances, then it will be exalted, not degraded."

She did not speak.

"Janey," he continued, his voice muffled in her hands, which he held against his mouth. "You and I have been locked out of Paradise—but we can climb over the gates."

She was still silent. Quentin had never spoken to her so openly before—after earlier disappointments he had sometimes hinted what he now expressed; but his love had never made her tremble; violent as it was, it was reverent.

"Janey . . . will you climb over the gates of Paradise with me?"

"No, dear."

"Why?"

"Because our love's not that sort."

"It's the sort that waits and is trampled on."

"It's strong enough to wait."

"How white your face is, Janey!—you speak brave words, but you're trembling."

"Yes, I'm trembling."

"Because you're not speaking the truth; you're lying—in the face of Love. You see plainly that if you and I wait till we can marry, we shall wait for ever. Our only chance is to take matters into our own hands, and let circumstances and opportunities be damned. You make out that you're

denying Love for its own good—that's another lie. 'Wait,' you say, because you're afraid. Why, what have we been doing all these years but 'wait'?—wait, wait; wait till our hearts are sick and our hopes are dust. If we wait any longer our love will die—and then will you find much comfort in the thought that we have 'waited'?"

"But there's the boys, Quentin."

An oath burst from young Lowe.

"The boys! the boys!—that's your war-cry, Janey. I'm nearly sick of it now. And how appropriate!—your brothers are such models of good behaviour, ain't they?"

"Don't, Quentin—it's for that very reason . . ."

"Yes," he said bitterly, "I remember how your reasons go—the boys have their secrets, so you must be without one; the boys have made a pretty general hash of law and order, so you must be a kind of Sunday-school ma'am. Really, Janet!"

"You don't understand what it is to live with people who think you ever so much better than you really are—you have to keep it up somehow."

"But surely you don't think you'll be committing a crime by giving our love a chance. You can't be such a prude as to stickle for a ceremony—a few lines scribbled, a few words muttered."

"It wouldn't be so bad if that were all. But it's no good trying to prove that you're simply offering me marriage with the ceremony left out. In some cases that might be true, but not in ours. You can't give the name of marriage to a few hurried meetings, all secrecy and lies. Things are

bad enough as they are, without adding—that mockery."

Quentin sighed.

"You're an extraordinary woman, Janey; you breathe the pure spirit of recklessness and paganism—and then suddenly you give vent to feelings that would become Hesba Stretton. You're a moralist at bottom—every woman is. There's no use looking for the Greek in a woman—they're all Semitic at heart, every one of 'em. You'll begin to quote the Ten Commandments in a minute."

Janey said nothing, and for some time they did not move. The wind rushed up to the farmhouse, blustered round it, and sighed away. The sunshine began to slant on the woods, tarnishing their western rims.

Then suddenly the kettle began to sing. They both lifted their heads as they heard it—it reminded them of the meal they were to have together.

"Janey, will you make tea?"

She stood up quickly as his arms fell from her waist. This sudden, most domestic, diversion was a relief. She began to prepare the meal, and he crouched by the fire and watched her.

"You shall pour out tea, love—then we'll do things in the grand style, and smash the tea-pot."

While she waited for the tea to draw she came over to the mirror above the fireplace and began to arrange her hair. The firelight played on her as she stood there, her arms lifted, her head thrown back, half her face in shadow, half flushed in the glow.

"Janey, you are the symbol of Love—all light

and darkness and disarray. It's cruel of you to stand like that—it's profane. For you're not Love, you're morality."

"It's funny, Quentin, but you never can understand my reasons for what I do—it's because they're not poetic enough, I suppose."

"You don't seem to have any reasons at all—only a moral sense."

He rose and went to sit at the table, resting his chin on his hands. She came behind him and bent over him.

"Dear one, I've seen such a lot of unhappy love that I've made up my mind ours shall be different. . . . I refuse you because I love you too much."

Quentin sighed impatiently.

"If I did what you ask," continued Janey tremulously, "our love would die."

"Nonsense!—how dare you say such things! Why should it die?"

"I—I don't know—but I'm sure it would. Oh, Quentin, I know you don't understand my reasons, because I really haven't given them to you properly. They're things I feel more than things I know."

She went and sat down opposite him, and began to pour out tea.

"Let's talk of something that isn't love."

He laughed.

"Let's breathe something that isn't air. Everything's love—if we talked about flowers, or books, or animals, or stars, we should be talking about love. Without love even our daily newspapers wouldn't appear."

"Then don't let's talk of anything—let's hold our tongues."

"Very well, Janey."

He smiled at the simplicity of the woman who thought she could silence love by holding her tongue.

For some minutes they sat opposite each other, swallowing scalding tea, crumbling cake upon their plates. Their first meal together, on which they had both set such store, had become an ordeal of mistrust and silence. The sunset was now ruddy on the woods, and the sky became full of little burning wisps of cloud, like brands flung out of the west. They hurried over the sky, and dropped behind a grass-grown hill in the east, crowding after one another, kindling from flame to scarlet, from scarlet to crimson. The wind came and fluttered again round the house—darkness began to drop into the room. Outside, a rainbow of colours gleamed and flashed in the sunset, as it struck the hammer ponds and the wet flowers of the garden—but the window looked east, and there was nothing but the firelight to wrestle with the shadows that crept from the corners towards the table. Soon the table with the food on it became mysterious, gloomed with shadows and half-lights —then the dimness crept up the bodies of Quentin and Janey, leaving only their white faces staring at each other. They had given up even the pretence to eat—their eyes were burning, and yet washed in tears.

Suddenly Janey sprang to her feet.

"I must go."

"Go—why, it's barely five."

"But I must."

He rose hurriedly. For a moment they faced each other over the unfinished meal, then Quentin came towards her.

"You're frightened, Janey?"

"Yes."

"Of me?"

"No."

"But of yourself. . . ."

She began to tremble violently, and suddenly his arms were round her, her sobs shaking them both.

"My little Janey. . . ."

"Quentin, Quentin . . . be merciful . . . I'm in your power."

He looked down into her drowning eyes, at the pure outlines of her face, seen palely through the dusk.

"I'm in your power," she repeated vaguely.

"Janey . . . Janey," he whispered, "you're in my power . . . but I'm in Love's. Love is stronger than either of us—and Love says 'Over the gates! —over the gates!'"

CHAPTER VIII

BRAMBLETYE

THE next few days were to Nigel like a piece of steep hill to a cart-horse. There was only one comfort—he felt no temptation to seek oblivion again as he had sought it at the Bells. He turned surlily from the men he had looked to for alleviation—he knew they could not give it. All they could do was to cover his wounds with septic rags —they had no oil and wine for him.

So he put down his head, seeing nothing but the little patch of ground over which he moved, planted his feet firmly, and pulled from the shoulder. Perhaps it was because he saw such a little of his way that he did not notice Janey was doing pretty much the same thing—with the difference that she fretted more, like a horse with a bearing-rein, which cannot pull from the collar. Side by side they were plunging up the hill of difficulty—and yet neither saw how the other strained.

Len vaguely realised that something was wrong with Janet, but he put it down to her anxiety about Nigel. An atmosphere of reticence and misunderstanding had settled on Sparrow Hall, frankness had gone and effects were put down to the wrong causes. Len tried to help Janey by helping Nigel. It struck him that his brother would be happier if he had less pottering work to do. So he took upon himself all the monotonous details of the yard, and asked Nigel to see to the larger

subject, lies a tranquil background of vineyard and cypress, lazily shining waters, dream cities on the hills. That was Life—a crucifixion against a background of green fields.

He was roused from his meditations by being nearly knocked down by a big car. He sprang into the hedge, and cursed with his mouth full of dust. The dust drifted, and he saw some one else crouching in the hedge not a hundred feet away. It was a girl with her bicycle—somehow he felt no surprise when he saw that it was Tony Strife, the "girl-kid," again.

She was obviously in difficulties. One of her tyres was off, and her repairing outfit lay scattered by the roadside. She did not see him, but stooped over her work with a hot face. Nigel did not think of greeting her—though their last encounter had impressed him far more than the first; she had even come once or twice into his dreams, standing with little Ivy among fields of daisies, in that golden radiance which shines only in sleep.

He was passing, when suddenly she lifted her head, and recognition at once filled her eyes—

"Oh, Mr. Smith! . . ."

Her voice had in it both relief and entreaty. He stopped at once.

"What's happened?"

"I've punctured my tyre—and I can't mend it."

He knelt down beside her, and searched among the litter on the road.

"Why, you haven't got any rubber!"

"That's just it. I haven't used my bicycle for

so long that I never thought of looking to see if everything was there. What shall I do?"

"Let me wheel it for you to a shop."

"There's nowhere nearer than Forest Row, and that's three miles away."

"Are you in a great hurry?"

"Yes—terrible. The others have gone up to Fairwarp in the car for a picnic. There wasn't enough room for us all, so Awdrey and I were to bicycle; then she said her skirt was too tight, so they squeezed her in, and I bicycled alone. It's quite close really, but I had this puncture, and they all passed me in the car, and never saw me, they were going so fast. I don't know how I can possibly be at Fairwarp in time."

"No—nor do I. We can't mend your tyre without the stuff, and the nearest shop is two miles from here."

"I'll have to go home, that's all. They'll be awfully sick about it—for I've got the nicest cakes on my carrier."

Nigel laughed.

"Then perhaps you have the advantage, after all. Just think—you can eat them all yourself!"

"They're too many for one person. I say, won't you have some?"

"That would be a shame."

"Oh no—do have some. I hate eating alone—and I'm awfully hungry."

She began to unstrap the parcel from her carrier.

"This is a dusty place for a picnic," said Nigel, "let's go down the lane to Brambletye, and eat them there."

The idea and the words came almost together. He did not pause to think how funny it was that he should suddenly want to go for a picinc with a school-girl of sixteen. It seemed quite natural, somehow. However, he could not help being a little dismayed at his own boldness. This girl would freeze up at once if by any chance he betrayed who he really was. As for her people—but the thought of their scandalised faces was an incitement rather than otherwise.

"Where's Brambletye?" asked Tony.

"Don't you know it?—it's the ruin at the bottom of that lane. You must have passed it often."

"I've never been down the lane—only along the road in the car."

"And you live so near! Why, I've often been to Brambletye, and I live much further away than you."

"Where do you live?"

This was a settler, to which Nigel had laid himself open by his enthusiasm. He decided to face the situation boldly.

"I live over in Surrey—at a place called Fan's Court."

"Fan's Court," she repeated vaguely. "I don't think I've heard of it."

"Oh, it's a long way from you—beyond Blindly Heath—and only a little place. I'm not very well off, you know."

She glanced at his shabby clothes, and felt embarrassed, for she saw that he had noticed the glance.

He picked up the litter from the roadside, and began to wheel her bicycle down the hill.

"I say," she breathed softly, "this is an adventure."

So it was—for both, in very different ways. For her it was an incursion into lawlessness. Her father was tremendously particular, even her girl friends had to pass the censor before intimacy was allowed, and as for men—why, she had never really known a man in her life, and here she was, picnicing with one her parents had never seen! Nigel was in exactly the opposite position—he was adventuring into law and respectability. He was with a girl, a school-girl, of the upper middle classes, to whom he was simply a rather poverty-stricken country gentleman—to whom his disgrace was unknown, who admitted him to her society on equal terms, ignorant of the barriers that divided them. He looked down at her as she walked by his side, her soft hair freckled with light, her eyes bright with her thrills—and a faint glow came into his cheeks, a faint flutter to his pulses, nothing fierce or mighty, but a great quiet surge that seemed to pass over him like the sea, and leave him stranded in simplicity.

They walked down the steep lane which led from the road, and wound for some yards at the back of Brasses Wood. Here in a hollow stood the shell of a ruined manor, flanked by a moat. Two ivy-smothered towers rose side by side, crowned by strange, pointed caps of stone; the walls were lumped with ivy, grown to an enormous density and stoutness. The place looked deserted. There was a small water-mill behind it, and a farm, but no one was about.

Nigel wheeled Tony's bicycle in at the dismantled door. The roof was gone, and all the upper floors—the sky looked down freely at the grass hillocks which filled the inside of the ruins. There were one or two small rooms still partly ceiled, and these were full of farm implements and mangolds.

A tremulous peace brooded over Brambletye. Birds twittered in the ivy, the tall, capped turrets were outlined against a sky that flushed faintly in the heart of its grey, as the sunset crept up it from the hills. Both Nigel and Tony were silent for a moment, standing there in the peace.

"Fancy my never having been here before," said the girl at last. "How ripping it is!"

"I'm glad I brought you."

"It's strange," continued Tony, as she unfastened the cakes from her bicycle, "that I haven't seen you before—before I met you at East Grinstead, I mean."

"Oh, I've been away, I've not lived at home for some time. You haven't been here long, have you?" He was anxious to shift the conversation from dangerous ground.

"We came to Shovelstrode about three years ago. Before that we lived near Seaford. I go to school at Seaford, you know."

School seemed a fairly safe topic.

"Tell me about your school," he said, as they began to eat the cakes.

School was Tony's paramount absorption, and no one else ever asked her to speak of it. Indeed, on the rare occasions when she expanded of her

own accord, her family would silence her with, "Tony, we're sick of that eternal school of yours —one would think it was the whole world, and your home just a corner of it." That was in fact the relative positions of home and school in Tony's mind. School was a world of kindred spirits, of things that mattered, home was a place of exile, to which three times a year one was bundled—and ignored. To her delight she realised that her new friend sympathised with her, and understood her feelings.

"You know, Mr. Smith, how beastly it is to be in a place where every one gets hold of the wrong end of what you say—where you don't seem to fit in, somehow."

"I do know—it's—it's exactly the same with me."

"Don't they like you being at home?"

"Rather!—they like it better than I deserve. But I don't fit in."

"And you've nowhere else to go?"

"I don't want to go anywhere else."

Tony looked mystified.

His eyes were shining straight into hers, and they seemed to be asking her something, pleading, beseeching. She found a strange feeling invading her, a feeling that had sometimes surged up in her heart when she saw a dying animal, or a bird fluttering against cage-bars. But this time there was a new intensity in it, and a stifling sense of pain. She suddenly put out her hand and laid it on his—then drew it shyly away.

The sky had flushed to a fiery purple behind

the turrets of Brambletye. A mysterious glow trembled on the ivy. The birds were twittering restlessly, and every now and then a robin uttered his harsh signal note. Nigel rose to his feet.

"You mustn't be late home, or your parents will get anxious."

"We've had such a ripping picnic—better than if I'd gone to Fairwarp."

"I've been dull company for you, I'm afraid."

"Oh, no—indeed not! I've so enjoyed talking to you about school."

Nigel smiled at her.

"Perhaps we can meet and talk about school another day."

"Yes—I expect we can. I'm generally alone, you see."

"Haven't you any friends?"

"I've heaps at school—but they all seem so far away."

He was wheeling her bicycle up the lane, and the sun, struggling through the clouds at last, flung long shadows before them. In summer the lanes are often ugly, white and bare, but in autumn they share the beauty of the fields. This lane, delicately slimed with Sussex mud, wound a soft gleaming brown between the hedges, except where the rain-filled ruts were crimson with the sky.

"It's only four miles to Shovelstrode," said Nigel. "I'll wheel your bicycle to Wilderwick corner—you won't mind going the rest of the way alone, will you?—it's not more than a hundred yards, and I shall have to go down Wilderwick

hill and make a bolt across country if I'm to be home in time."

"I hope I haven't kept you."

"Oh, no—I've enjoyed every moment of it."

"So have I. That man Furlonger did me a good turn after all."

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"Well, if it hadn't been for him, I'd never have met you."

"Furlonger . . ."

"Yes—he was the man who was bothering me at East Grinstead Station, at least my people say it must have been. He came out of prison that day, you know."

"Oh . . ."

"Have you heard of him?"

"Yes. I—I know him slightly."

"He's a dreadful man, isn't he?"

Nigel licked his lips.

"Yes—he's a rotter. But he—he has his good points—all men have."

"I don't seen how a man like Furlonger can. He seems bad all around. I wonder you care to know him."

"I don't care—I can't help it."

"I suppose you knew him before he went to gaol."

"Yes—and unluckily I can't drop him now."

"I should."

Nigel stared at her, and suddenly felt angry.

"Why, you hard-hearted little girl?"

"He's bad all through—father says so."

"Your father doesn't know him. I do, and I say he has his good points."

"Are you very fond of him?"

"No—I'm not."

"Then why do you stick up for him so? You're quite angry."

"No—no, I'm not angry. But I hate to hear you speaking so harshly and—ignorantly."

"I have my ideals," said Tony, with a primitive attempt at loftiness. "A woman should have clearly defined ideals on morals and things."

Nigel could not suppress a smile.

"Certainly—but it's no good having ideals unless you're able to forgive the people who don't come up to 'em. Perhaps it isn't their fault—perhaps it's yours."

"Mine! What are you talking about? Are you trying to make out that I'm to blame for a man like Furlonger going to gaol?"

"No—of course not. But suppose that man Furlonger stood before you now, and asked you to help him, and be his friend, and give him a hand out of the mud—what would you do?"

She was a little taken aback by his eagerness. She hesitated a moment.

"I'd tell him to go to a clergyman——"

"Oh!" said Nigel blankly.

CHAPTER IX

SOME PEOPLE ARE HAPPY—IN DIFFERENT WAYS

TONY STRIFE reached Shovelstrode in a state of reckless and sublime uncertainty. She was quite uncertain as to whether she meant to confess or not. Precedent urged her to do so. Whenever she did something of which she was not sure her parents would approve, it was part of her code to confess it. Quite possibly her people would not blame her, they might even be grateful to Mr. Smith, as they had been on a former occasion. On the other hand, they might shake their heads at the picnic part of the business. Who was Mr. Smith, that he should go picnicing with their daughter?—and she would not be so confident in answering as she had been before.

During their short interview on East Grinstead platform it had not been possible to take more than a superficial view of him, either with eyes or mind; but the close contemplation at Brambletye had impressed her with the conviction that he was "rather queer." He evidently did not belong to their set; not because he was poor—they knew several people who were poor—but because of a certain alien quality she could not define. It was not, either, because he was not a "gentleman," though she had her occasional doubts of that, alternating with savage contempt for them. It was because his manner, his look, his behaviour, had all been utterly different from what she was used

to, or had met at Shovelstrode. She felt that if her parents were to question her searchingly, her answers would be unsatisfactory, and she would not be allowed to meet him again, as he had suggested. And she wanted to meet him again; he had interested her, he had attracted her by that very "queerness" with which he had occasionally repelled her. She wanted to tell him more about her school, to have more of his strange confidences, hear more from him about Furlonger, see again that hunted look in his eyes. Only one of her memories of him was tender—that was when his infinite suffering had called to her out of his eyes, and she had answered it in a sudden new and divine surge of pain. She caught her breath sharply as she went into the house.

Yes—she had decided at last—she would keep her secret—her first of any importance. She would not risk interference with what looked like a glowing adventure kindled to brighten her exile. Besides, there was another consideration. If Awdrey were to hear of it, she would at once begin to weave one of her silly romances—make out Mr. Smith was in love. Ugh! Tony's shoulders shrugged high in disdain.

It would be quite easy to give an account of her afternoon which did not include her adventure. She would tell how her tyre had punctured, how she had tried in vain to mend it, and had at last come home on foot. Her concealment did not afflict her, as she had at first imagined. On the contrary, it gave her a strange, new feeling of importance and independence. For the first time

a certain warmth and colour crept into her thoughts, a certain pride invaded the shy dignity of her step.

That night she dreamed that she had gone to meet Mr. Smith at Brambletye. She saw the two capped turrets against a background of shimmering light. Mr. Smith took her hand and looked into her eyes in that strange, troubled way which called up as before an answering pain. He said something she could not remember when she woke. Then suddenly a dark shape seemed to rush between them and whirl them apart. She cried out, and Mr. Smith seemed to be answering her from a great distance: "Don't be frightened—it's only Furlonger—it's only Furlonger." But the fear grew upon her, the darkness wrapt her round, and, struggling in the darkness, she awoke.

All that day she wondered if she would meet him. She prowled round Shovelstrode with her dog, ignoring an invitation from Awdrey to "come for a stroll, and hear the latest about Captain le Bourbourg." She was used to being alone during her holidays. It was her habit to walk with Prince in the little twisting lanes round her home. She never went far, but she used to spend long hours in the fields, gathering wild flowers and leaves for her collection, or making Prince go racing in the grass. A rather forlorn little figure, she had gone through the days unconscious of her forlornness. But to-day she felt it—because she was expecting some one who did not come. She did not meet him in any of those thick-rutted lanes, nor in Swites

Wood, nor on the borders of Holtye Common where she went for blackberries.

She began to wonder if he would ever come, or if her glimpse of a world beyond the strait boundaries of her life had been but a flash—a sudden haze of gold in the ruins of Brambletye. She felt her loneliness, the blank of having no one to speak to about school, the strange tickling interest of confidences outside her experience. That night as she knelt by the bed and watched the moon behind the pines, she added to her prayers a stiff petition that she might "meet Mr. Smith again."

Tony's belief in prayer was quite mechanical, and when the next day she saw her shabby friend on a stile at the top of Wilderwick hill, she in no wise connected the sight with those few uncomfortable moments on her knees.

"Good morning," she said simply; "I'm so glad to see you."

Nigel smiled at her. At first she had wondered a little whether she liked his smile—to-day she definitely decided that she did.

"I hoped we'd meet again," he said.

"So did I," answered the virginal candour of sixteen.

"You don't think me queer, then?"

"Ye-es. But I like it."

"Could we be friends?"

"Yes—rather!"

He held out his hand. He was smiling—but suddenly as her hand took his, she saw the old wretched look creep into his eyes, together with something else that puzzled her. Were those

tears? Did men ever cry? She found herself feeling frightened and vexed.

Nigel crimsoned with shame, and the fire of his anger licked up the tears of his weakness. The next moment he was looking at her with dry eyes —and, strange to say, from that day his childish fits of weeping troubled him less.

He and Tony turned almost mechanically down the narrow grass lane leading past Old Surrey Hall to the woods of Cowsanish. They did not speak much at first—indeed, a kind of restraint seemed established between them. Nigel wondered more than ever what had made him seek her out—this naïve, shy, rather limited little girl. All yesterday he had been struggling with a desperate need of her. He could not understand why he wanted her so; she was not nearly as sympathetic as Len and Janey, she was not so interesting, even, and yet he wanted her.

At first he had thought it was her ignorance of his past life which made her presence such refreshment—the blessed fact that with her he had a clean slate to write over. After all, though Len and Janey had forgiven, they could not forget—for them his muddled sum was only crossed out, not wiped clean. With Tony he could start afresh from the beginning, not merely where his miserable blunder ended. And yet this was not all that drew him to her. He felt deep down in his heart a subtler, more compelling attraction. What brought him to Tony was a development of the same feeling that had made him catch up the unlovely Ivy in his arms and find her sweet. It was

a fragment of that strange, new part of him, which had been born in prison, and frightened Len and Janey—the child.

He could not remember that before his dark years he had felt particularly young for his age, or cared for young society; but now his heart seemed full of irrepressible torrents of youth. He wanted to be with boys and girls, to hear their shouts, to share their laughter, to join in their games—not as a "grown-up," but as one of themselves. Why did every one expect him to have grown old in prison? Sorrow does not always make old, it often makes young. It sends a man back pleading to the forgotten days of his youth, struggling to recapture them once more, and bring their carelessness into his awful care.

To-day he lost his troubles in finding grasses and leaves for Tony's collection. After a time her constraint wore off. She chattered to him about school friends, lessons and games, daring adventures and desperate scrapes. That day he found such a mood more sweet to him than any glimpse of pity or understanding she could have shown. He might want her compassion—the woman in her—sometimes, but only transiently; what he wanted most was the child in her, for it answered the sorrow-born child crying in the darkness of his heart.

They scrambled in the hedges for bloody-twig and bryony, they gathered the yellowing hazel, and bunches of strange pods. Nigel was able to tell her the names of many plants and bushes she had not known before—he was wonderfully enthu-

siastic, and loved to hear about the botany walks at school, and the other collections she had made, which had sometimes won prizes.

It was past noon when they turned home. The distances were dim, hazed with mist and sunshine. A faint wind was stirring in the trees, and now and then a shower of golden leaves swept into the lane, whirled round, then fluttered slowly to the grass. Some rain had fallen early in the morning, and the hedges were still wet, sending up sweet steams of perfume to the cloud-latticed sky.

Nigel spoke suddenly.

"Do your parents know about me?"

"They know about East Grinstead, but not about Brambletye."

"Shall you tell them?"

"No—I don't think I shall. I—I'm not at all sure what they'd say if they knew all the facts."

"Nor am I," said Nigel grimly.

"Besides, I hate telling people about things I really enjoy—it spoils it all, somehow. You don't think it's wrong, do you?"

"No—why should it be?"

"I don't know—only whenever a thing's absolutely heavenly, one can't help thinking there's something wrong about it."

"Well, I don't see why there should be anything wrong about this. I'm lonely, and so are you—why shouldn't we be friends?"

"I've never done anything like it before. It's funny that father and mother are so awfully particular, for they don't bother about me much in

other ways. I'm nearly always alone when I'm at Shovelstrode. Father's busy, and mother's not strong, and Awdrey has so many people to go about with."

"And when you come back from a long walk, no one asks you where you've been, or whom you've met?"

"I'm not supposed to go for long walks by myself—only to potter round the estate—and no one ever asks me any questions."

Her voice was rather pathetic—in contrast to her proud assurance when she talked about school.

"We'll meet again," he said impulsively.

"I hope so—I hope so awfully. To-morrow I've got to go over to Haxsmiths in the car with Awdrey, but I've nothing else all the rest of this week. I wanted father to take me to Lingfield races on Saturday, but he can't."

"Do you like race-meetings?"

"I've never been to one in my life. I wanted so much to go this time—I'm generally at school, you know, and it seemed such a good chance; but father has to be in Lewes, and Awdrey's spending the week-end in Brighton—besides, I couldn't go with her alone, one wants a man."

"I'll take you if you like."

"You! Oh!"

"Shouldn't you like it?"

"I should love it—but if any one saw us . . . father would be furious."

"No one shall see us—we won't go into any of the enclosures and risk meeting your friends. Do let me take you."

Tony flushed with pleasure and fright. This was adventure indeed.

"I'd love to go. Oh, how ripping!"

When Nigel reached home that morning he went straight to find Janey. There was something vital between him and his sister—each brought the other the first-fruits of emotion. Janet might find Leonard a tenderer comforter, more thoughtful, more demonstrative, but there was not between them that affinity of sorrow there was between her and Nigel. Not that she ever told him, even hinted, why she suffered, but the mere glance of his eyes, so childish yet so troubled, the mere touch of those hands coarsened and spoiled by the toil of his humiliation, was more comfort to her than Len's caresses or tender words. Nigel could repeat the magic formula of sympathy—"I too have known. . . ."

He felt, unconsciously, the same towards her. But it was more happiness than grief that he brought her. He had acquired the habit of eating his heart out alone, but happiness was so new and strange that he hardly knew what to do with it. So he ran with it to Janey, like a child to his mother with something he does not quite understand.

To-day he found her in the kitchen, sitting by the fire, and watching some of her doubtful cookery. Her back was bent, and her arms rested from the elbow on her lap, the long hands dropping over the knees. Her face, thrust forward from the

gloom of her hair, wore a strange white look of defiance, while her lips quivered with surrender.

He sat down at her feet, and leaned his head against her lap. He vaguely felt she was unhappy, but he did not try to comfort her, merely took one of the long, hot hands in his. She did not speak, either—but her heart kindled at his presence. She knew that he had been happier for the last two days, though yesterday he had also seemed to have some anxiety, fretting and questioning. His happiness meant much to her. All her happiness now was vicarious—Quentin's, Leonard's or Nigel's. In her own heart were only flashes and sparks of it, that scorched as well as gladdened.

Life was a perplexity—life was pulling her two ways. She seemed to be hanging, a tortured, wind-swung thing, between earth and heaven, and she could hardly tell which hurt her most—her sudden falls down or her sudden snatchings up. Earth and heaven, brute and god, were always meeting now, clashing like two ill-tuned cymbals.

Her shame was that her love and Quentin's had not been strong enough to wait. She had looked upon it as an exalted spiritual passion, and it had suddenly shown itself impatient and bodily. It had fallen to the level of a thousand other loves. Sometimes she almost wished that it had been a more despised lover who had won her surrender —better fall from the trees than from the stars.

Moreover, her sacrifice had not won her what she was seeking, but something inferior and makeshift. What she had dreamed of as the crown of

love had been a life of kingly, fearless association, the sanctification of every day, an undying Together. That was still far away. Borne on an undercurrent she had till then hardly suspected, she and Quentin had been washed into the backwaters of their dream. She had only one comfort, and that was paradoxically at times the chief of her regrets—Quentin was happy. Unlike her, he seemed to have found all he had been seeking. She was still unsatisfied, her heart still yearned after higher, sweeter things, but again and again he told her he had all his desire.

"I am in Paradise—Janey, my own Janey. We climbed over the gates, and we are there—together in the garden"—and his lips would burn against hers, and even the tears brim from his fiery, sunken eyes.

She never let him think she was not happy. She meekly and bravely accepted the vocation of her womanhood—if he was happy, all her wishes, except certain secret personal ones, were gratified. For his sake she put aside her dreams, and fixed her thoughts on what was, forgetting what might have been. She broke her heart like a box of spikenard, that she might anoint him king.

A shudder passed through Janey, and Nigel's head stirred on her knee. He lifted it, and looked into her eyes—then he drew down her face to his and kissed it.

"You're tired, my Janey."

His voice thrilled with a tenderness that carried her back to the days before he went to prison.

"No, dear, not tired—but I've a bit of a headache."

"I'm so sorry. Oughtn't you to lie down?"

"No—it will go."

"Poor old sister!"

He put up his hand and laid it gently on her forehead. Then suddenly he hid his face.

"Oh, Janey, I'm so happy!"

CHAPTER X

TONY BACKS AN OUTSIDER

NOVEMBER came in cloth of gold—a hazy sunshine put yellow everywhere, into the bleak rain-washed fields, the white, cold mirrors of ponds, the brown heart of woods. Lingfield races were on the first of the month—from noon onwards the race-trains clanked down from London, and disgorged their sordid contents. The public-houses were full, the little village, generally so pure and drowsy, woke up to its monthly contamination. It was the last meeting of the flat-racing season, and most of the "county" was present, crowding the paddock and the more expensive enclosures, eating its lunch to the accompaniment of a band too much engrossed in the betting for the interests of good music.

Nigel Furlonger met Tony Strife at the top of Wilderwick hill. He had dressed himself with more care than usual—in the girl's interest he must look respectable. Leonard and Janet had been immensely surprised when he told them he meant to go to the races. The Furlonger disreputableness owed some of its celebrity to the fact that it ran along channels of its own, neglecting those approved by wealth and fashion.

"Feel you've got too much cash?" jeered Leonard.

"I shan't do any betting to speak of."

"Don't you!" said Janey; "we're stony enough as things are."

"But I'm not bound to lose—I may win, and retrieve the family fortunes."

"Look here, my boy," said Len, "you leave the family fortunes alone. You've done too much in that line already."

Nigel coloured furiously—but the next moment his anger cooled; he had been wonderfully gentler during the last few days. He turned, and emptied his pockets on the table.

"There—take it all—except five bob for luck—and a half-crown for——" He was going to have said "the little girl's tea," but stopped just in time.

He occasionally wondered why he did not tell Len and Janet about Tony. But he felt doubtful as to what they might say. They would never understand how he could find such a comradeship congenial. Tony was only sixteen, and lived a very different life from his. They might laugh—no, they would not do that; more likely they would be anxious and compassionate, they would think it one of the unhealthy results of prison, they would be sorry for him, and he could not bear that they should be sorry for what brought him so much happiness. Besides, he had a natural habit of reserve—even before he went to prison he had kept secrets from Len and Janey.

Tony was waiting for him when he reached their meeting-place. She wore a plain dark coat and skirt, but she had put on a wide hat, with a wreath of crimson leaves round it, and instead of plaiting her hair, she let it stream over her shoulders, thick and sleek, without a curl. In her hand she clutched a little purse.

"I'm going to bet on a horse," she said in an awe-struck voice.

"Which horse?"

"I don't know. I'll see when I get there."

"I'll try and find something pretty safe for you, and I'll have my money on it too."

"Isn't it exciting!" whispered Tony. "What should I do if I met Mrs. Arkwright or any of the mistresses!"

Mrs. Arkwright and the mistresses were not the people Furlonger dreaded to meet.

He and Tony swung gaily along the cinder-track leading to the course. It was deserted, except for a little knot at the starting gate. The girl shrank rather close to him as they came into the crowd. The shouting made her nervous and flustered—that people should make such a noise over a shady thing like betting seemed to her extraordinary. She touched Nigel's elbow, and showed him her purse, now open, and containing half-a-crown.

"Which is the best horse?"

"I wish I knew."

"May I look at the card?"

He gave it to her. She seemed puzzled.

"How can I tell which horse to bet on?"

A man beside them laughed, and Nigel flushed indignantly.

"You can't tell much by the card; I'll go over to the ring in a moment, and find out what the odds are. But as you don't want to put on more than half-a-crown, I'd keep it till the big race, if I were you."

"Which is the big race?"

"The Lingfield Cup. It's the last—but we'll enjoy the others, even though we've got nothing on 'em."

They enjoyed them thoroughly. Hanging over the rail, their shouts were just as noisy and as desperate as if they had all their possessions at stake. Tony was thrilled to the depths—the clamour and excitement in the betting ring, the odd, disreputable people all round her, surreptitiously exchanging shillings and horses' names—the clanging bell, the shout of "They're off!" the flash of opera-glasses, the mad rush by, the cheers for the winner . . . all plunged her into an orgy of excitement. She felt subtly wicked and daring, and also, when Nigel began to explain the technicalities of racing, infinitely worldly-wise. What would the girls at school say when they found out she knew the meaning of "Ten to one, bar one," or "Money on both ways"? She wrote such phrases down in her "nature note-book," which she carried about with her to record botanical discoveries, birds seen, sunsets, and equally blameless doings.

At last the time came for the Lingfield Cup. Tony's hands began to quiver. Now was the moment when she should actually become a part of that new world swinging round her. She would have her stake in the game—and a big stake too, for half-a-crown meant more than a fortnight's pocket-money. She looked nervously at Mr. Smith.

"We'll see 'em go past before we put our money on," said he, with a calmness she thought unnatural. "You can tell a lot by the way a horse canters up."

They leaned over the rail, and Tony gave a little cry at the first sight of colours coming from the paddock.

"Here they are—oh, what a beautiful horse!"

"A bit short in the leg," said Nigel, "we won't put our money on him."

"What about that bay—the one coming now?"

"He's a good 'un, I should say. That's Milk-O, the favourite."

"Let's back him."

"Wait, here's another. That's Midsummer Moon, the betting's 100 to 1 against him."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that he's a rank outsider."

"Then we mustn't put our money on him."

"I've known outsiders win splendidly, and, of course, if they do, their backers get thundering odds. If we put our money on Milk-O and he wins we're only in for five shillings each, but if Midsummer Moon wins for us, why, we get over twelve pounds."

"Oh!" gasped Tony. Her eyes grew round. "Over twelve pounds"—that would mean all sorts of splendours—a new hockey-stick, a real spliced beauty instead of the silly unspliced thing her father thought "good enough for a girl"; she would be able to get that wonderful illustrated edition of the *Idylls of the King,* which she had seen in Gladys Gates' home and admired so much;

and directly she went back to school she could give a gorgeous midnight feast—a feast of the superior order, with lemonade and veal-and-ham pies, not one of those scratch affairs at which you ate only buns and halfpenny meringues and drank a concoction of acid-drops dissolved in the water-jug.

Nigel saw the enthusiasm growing on her face.

"Well, would you like to put your money on Midsummer Moon? Of course you're more likely to lose, but if you win, you'll make a good thing out of it."

"Do you think he'll win?"

"I can't say—but it's a sporting chance."

"I think it's worth the risk," said Tony in a low, thrilled voice.

He looked at her intently.

"I always like to see any one ready to back an outsider."

"Don't people generally?"

"No—and nor will you, perhaps, when you're older."

She gave him her half-crown, and he disappeared with it into the crowd, having first carefully put her next a group of respectable farmers' wives. In some ways, thought Tony, he was just as particular as father. She wished he would let her go with him into the ring.

He came back in a few moments. Then suddenly the bell clanged.

"They're off!"

Silence dropped on the babel almost discon-

certingly. Opera-glasses flashed towards the start, rows of heads and bodies hung over the rail, Tony's breath came in short gasps, so did Nigel's—he was desperately anxious for that outsider to win. As they had no glasses they could not see which colours led at the bend, but as the horses swung into the straight, there were shouts of "Milk-O! —Milk-O!"

"Damn the brute!" said Nigel, which gave Tony another thrill of new experience. She had actually spent the afternoon with a man who swore!"

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"Milk-O!"—"Spreadeagle!"—the yells were deafening—then suddenly changed into a mixture of cheers and groans, as the favourite dashed by the post.

"And—where's Midsummer Moon?" gasped poor Tony, as the field clattered in.

"Never started, lady," said a stout policeman, who, being drafted in from elsewhere, did not recognise Nigel as the young fellow on ticket-of-leave who came to report himself every month at East Grinstead.

"Oh, dear!" cried Tony, "we've lost our money."

"Never put your money on an outsider, lady," said the stout constable.

Nigel turned to her with an odd, beseeching look in his eyes.

"I'm sorry . . . I'm dreadfully sorry. It's my

fault—if it hadn't been for me you'd have backed the favourite."

"Oh, it doesn't matter the very tiniest bit."

"But I'm so sorry—I feel a beast."

"Please don't. I've enjoyed myself awfully, and it's made the race ever so much more exciting, having some money on it."

"All right!" had been sung out from the weighing-ground, and the crowd was either pressing round the bookies, or dispersing along the course.

"We'd better go, I think," said Nigel, "you mustn't be late home."

"It's been perfectly ripping," and Tony suddenly slipped her warm gloved hand into his. "It was so kind of you to take me."

"But I made you back an outsider."

"Oh, never mind about it—please don't."

She gave his hand a little squeeze as she spoke, and suddenly, over him once again passed that thrill of great simplicity which he had experienced first at Brambletye. He became dumb—quite dumb and simple, with infinite rest in his heart.

They turned to leave, jostling their way through the crowd towards the cinder-track. Soon the clamour and scramble were far behind, and they found the little footpath that ran through the fields near Goatsluck Farm.

"Which way are we going home?" asked Tony.

"We'll have tea before we go home. Will you come with me and have tea in a cottage?"

"Oh, how ripping!..."

Nigel looked round him. A cottage belonging to Goatsluck Farm was close at hand—one of those

dwarfed, red cottages, where the windows gleam like eyes under the steep roof.

"Let's ask there," he said, "perhaps we can have it in the garden."

The labourer's wife was only too glad of a little incident and pence-earning. She laid a table for them by a clump of lilac bushes, now bare. One or two chrysanthemums were still in bloom, and sent their damp sweetness to the meal that Nigel and Tony had together. It was a very plain meal —only bread and butter and tea, but simplicity and bread and butter had now become vital things to Furlonger. Neither he nor Tony spoke much, but their silences were no less happy than the words that broke them.

The sun had set, a hazy crimson smeared the west, and above it hung one or two dim stars. A little cold wind rustled suddenly in the bushes, and fluttered the table-cloth. Tony's face was pale in the twilight, and her eyes looked unnaturally large and dark. Then she and Nigel realised that they were both leaning forward over the table, as if they had something especially important to say to each other. . . .

The wind dropped suddenly, and the fogs swept up and veiled the stars. The crimson deepened to purple in the west.

"Are you cold?" asked Furlonger awkwardly, and drew back.

"No, thank you," said Tony, and leaned back too.

A few minutes later they rose to go. It was half-past five, and strange shadows were in the lanes,

where the ruts and puddles gleamed. An owl called from Ashplats Wood. The November dusk had suddenly become chill. Nigel slipped off his overcoat and wrapped it round Tony.

"I don't want it," he insisted. "Oh, what a funny little thing you look!"

"It comes down right over my heels—it's ripping and warm."

They walked on in silence for about a quarter of a mile. Then the distant throbbing of a car troubled the evening. It drew nearer, and they stood aside to let it pass them in the narrow lane.

But instead of passing, it pulled up suddenly, and out jumped Sir Gambier Strife.

Their surprise and dismay were so great that for a time they could not use their tongues. Sir Gambier stood before them, his face flushed, his mouth a little open, while the dusk and the arc-lights of the huge motor had games with his figure, making it seem monstrous and misshapen.

"Father——" began Tony, and then stopped. She was really the least disconcerted of the three, for she had only Mr. Smith to deal with—surely the presence of such a knight could easily be explained and forgiven. But the other two had to face the complication of Furlonger.

"What the ——" broke from Strife, after the time-honoured formula of the man who wants to swear, but objects on principle to swearing before women.

The colour mounted on Nigel's face, from his neck to his cheeks, from his cheeks to his forehead —and gradually his head drooped.

Tony turned to him with sublime assurance.

"Father, let me introduce Mr. Smith."

"Smith!"

Nigel opened his mouth to speak, but the words stuck to his tongue.

"You know about Mr. Smith," continued Tony, "how helpful he was at East Grinstead——"

"He told you his name was Smith, did he?"

"Of course. I know him quite well now—he lives at Fan's Court, near Blindley Heath, and . . ." Tony's voice trailed off. She wondered why Mr. Smith did not speak for himself.

"You damn liar!" roared Strife, swinging round on Nigel.

"Father!"

"Sir Gambier, let me explain. . . ."

"I won't hear a word. Explanation, indeed! What explanation can there be?—you victimiser of innocent little girls!—Antoinette, get into the car at once, and come home. Then we'll hear all the lies this Furlonger's been cramming you with."

"Furlonger . . ."

The word came in a long gasp.

"Yes—Furlonger. That's his name. 'Smith,' indeed!"

"Father, he isn't Furlonger. Furlonger was quite different, short and dark and dirty-looking."

"I tell you this is Furlonger—and he's quite dirty-looking enough for me. Come along, Antoinette, I won't have you standing here."

"But you aren't Furlonger—are you, Mr. Smith?"

Her voice rang with entreaty and the first horror of doubt. Nigel turned his eyes to hers and tried to plead with them; but they were not understanding—he saw he had only the clumsy weapon of his tongue to fight with.

"I am Furlonger," he said in a low voice.

There was a brief, electric pause. Tony had grown very white.

"Then who was that other man?—Why did you tell me your name was Smith?"

"I've no idea who the other fellow was, and I gave my name as Smith because I felt sure you'd have heard of Furlonger."

"But why—why——"

"Come along, miss," interrupted Sir Gambier. "I won't have you talking to this scoundrel."

"But I want to know why he told me all those lies."

Her face had grown hard as well as white.

"He had very good reasons, I'm sure," sneered Strife.

Nigel suddenly found his tongue.

"Tony!" he cried, "Tony!"

"What damned impudence is this?—'Tony' indeed! You'll not dare address my daughter by that name, sir."

"Tony," repeated Nigel, too desperate to realise what he was calling her. "I swear I never meant you any harm. I know it looks like it—but you mustn't think so. I wanted to be your friend because—because you didn't know of my disgrace, you treated me like a human being. You talked to me about simple things—you made me feel good

and clean when I was with you. That's why I 'told you all these lies.'"

The girl began to tremble. Sir Gambier laughed.

"Tony—don't forsake me."

"Hold your tongue, sir," thundered Strife. "I won't have any more of this. Get into the car, Antoinette."

He touched her arm, and for the first time she responded. She turned and climbed into the car, still trembling, her head bowed, tears on her cheek.

Nigel sprang on to the step.

"Tony—can't you forgive me? I didn't deceive you from any wrong motive. Why do you look like that? Is it because I've been in prison?—I —I suffered there. . . ."

"Oh don't!" gasped the girl, "don't speak to me—I can't bear it. I—I'm so dreadfully—disappointed."

His eyes searched her face for some pity or understanding. Instead he saw only horror, pain, and something akin to fright.

"Don't!" she repeated.

Then he suddenly realised that she was too young to understand.

He fell back from the step, and covered his eyes.

Sir Gambier sprang into the driver's seat. Tony did not speak again. Her father took the steering-wheel, and the car throbbed away into the dusk. She made no protest, and only once looked back —at the man who still stood in the middle of the lane, with his hands over his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

DISILLUSION AT SIXTEEN

RATHER to Tony's surprise, she and her father drove in silence. As a matter of fact, Sir Gambier was baffled by his younger daughter. Awdrey he could have dealt with easily enough—he was used to Awdrey's scrapes. But Tony had always been more or less impersonal—a vague some one for whom one paid school-bills, who came home for the holidays, made herself pretty scarce, and then went back to school again, to write prim letters home every Sunday. It was a new idea that this half-realised being should suddenly show herself possessed of a personality in the form of a scrape —and such a scrape too! Furlonger! He grunted with fury, but—as would never have been the case if he had had Awdrey to deal with—he said nothing.

Once, however, he looked sideways, and noticed how Tony was sitting. Her back was bent, and her arms rested on her knees, the hands clenched between them; her chin was a little thrust forward into the darkness through which they rushed.

At last they reached Shovelstrode. The moon was high above the pines, and they seemed to be waving in waters of silver. The house-front shimmered in the white light, as the motor pulsed up to it. Tony climbed down, and stood stiffly on the step.

"You'd better go to your room," said Sir Gambier in muddled rage. "I—I expect your mother will want to speak to you."

"Very well," said Tony.

She walked quickly upstairs, went into her room, and sat down on the bed. A square of moonlight lay on the floor, and the moving shadows curtsied across it. They and the pines outside seemed to be nodding to her grotesquely under the moon—they seemed to be mocking her for her great illusion lost.

"Furlonger . . ." she repeated to herself. "Furlonger. . . ."

A sick quake of rage was in her heart. Her feelings were still confused, but definite grievances stood out of the jumble. This man whom she had thought so much of—in school-girl language "had a rave on"—had deceived her, told her lies, acted them, and won by them . . . well, the horrible thing was that she did not really know how much or how little he had won.

But worse still was the realisation that he had made her do unconsciously something she thought wrong. Like most girls of her age she had a cast-iron code of morals. When a school-girl sets out to be moral, there is no professor of ethics or minister of religion that can touch her—her morality has behind it all the enormous force of inexperience, it can neither stretch nor bend, and it breaks only at the risk of her whole spiritual life.

She was horrified to think she had given her friendship to a scoundrel, even though she had

done it ignorantly. It was like befriending a girl who cheated or told tales. For her his crime had no attraction or interest—it was just a hideous blot and defilement. She had often heard the Wickham Rubber scandal discussed, and now storehoused memories came to appal her. Hundreds of people, most of them already poor, had been ruined and plunged into misery—widows with growing families, elderly spinsters with hard-gathered savings, poor old men with the terror of the workhouse closing on them with age, had trusted this Furlonger once and execrated him now. He was like that dreadful man in the Psalms, who laid wait to murder the innocent—"he doth ravish the poor when he getteth him into his den." And she had allowed this man to be her friend, she had confided her secrets to him, she had dreamed of him and prayed to meet him. . . . Tony's teeth and hands clenched, and her eyes grew miserable and hard.

Then she began to wonder what had made Furlonger want her friendship. What had he and she in common? Somehow she could not for a moment believe that he had sought her out from unworthy motives. The fact would always remain that he had wanted her friendship, that he had not given her a word which was not kind or courteous, that he had come to her rescue in her hour of need . . . the tears rushed to her eyes; that was the bitterest part of all—her memories of his kindliness and knight-errantry—pictures of East Grinstead, Swites Wood, Brambletye, Lingfield Park, and that little old cottage by Goatsluck Farm. Sud-

denly she found herself making up her mind not to join her father and mother in condemning him. She would take his part in the scene which she knew was at hand.

She soon heard her father calling her, and went down. He pointed into her mother's boudoir, a small room with French windows opening on the lawn. It was full of vague furniture and vague mixed colours, and it seemed to Tony as if she were swimming through it up to the couch where her mother lay. It never struck her as strange that her father should seem unable to deal with her himself, but should hand her over to this weak invalid, who lay with closed eyes in the lamplight.

"Now, I don't want a scene," she said, without opening them.

"Tony won't make a scene," said Sir Gambier; "she's a deep one."

"Oh, Antoinette," sighed Lady Strife—"I never was so surprised in my life as when I heard of your deceit."

"My deceit!" said Tony quickly.

"Yes—going about with a man like Furlonger, and hiding it from your father and mother—don't you call that deceit?"

"I didn't know he was Furlonger."

"But you knew it was wrong to have a secret friendship with any man whatsoever. I never heard of such a thing in a young girl of your age and position—it's what housemaids do, and not nice housemaids at that."

"Mother," cried Tony, her voice shaking unexpectedly, "it was an adventure."

fault—if it hadn't been for me you'd have backed the favourite."

"Oh, it doesn't matter the very tiniest bit."

"But I'm so sorry—I feel a beast."

"Please don't. I've enjoyed myself awfully, and it's made the race ever so much more exciting, having some money on it."

"All right!" had been sung out from the weighing-ground, and the crowd was either pressing round the bookies, or dispersing along the course.

"We'd better go, I think," said Nigel, "you mustn't be late home."

"It's been perfectly ripping," and Tony suddenly slipped her warm gloved hand into his. "It was so kind of you to take me."

"But I made you back an outsider."

"Oh, never mind about it—please don't."

She gave his hand a little squeeze as she spoke, and suddenly, over him once again passed that thrill of great simplicity which he had experienced first at Brambletye. He became dumb—quite dumb and simple, with infinite rest in his heart.

They turned to leave, jostling their way through the crowd towards the cinder-track. Soon the clamour and scramble were far behind, and they found the little footpath that ran through the fields near Goatsluck Farm.

"Which way are we going home?" asked Tony.

"We'll have tea before we go home. Will you come with me and have tea in a cottage?"

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"I don't want it," he insisted. "Oh, what a funny little thing you look!"

"It comes down right over my heels—it's ripping and warm."

They walked on in silence for about a quarter of a mile. Then the distant throbbing of a car troubled the evening. It drew nearer, and they stood aside to let it pass them in the narrow lane.

But instead of passing, it pulled up suddenly, and out jumped Sir Gambier Strife.

Their surprise and dismay were so great that for a time they could not use their tongues. Sir Gambier stood before them, his face flushed, his mouth a little open, while the dusk and the arc-lights of the huge motor had games with his figure, making it seem monstrous and misshapen.

"Father——" began Tony, and then stopped. She was really the least disconcerted of the three, for she had only Mr. Smith to deal with—surely the presence of such a knight could easily be explained and forgiven. But the other two had to face the complication of Furlonger.

"What the——" broke from Strife, after the time-honoured formula of the man who wants to swear, but objects on principle to swearing before women.

The colour mounted on Nigel's face, from his neck to his cheeks, from his cheeks to his forehead —and gradually his head drooped.

Tony turned to him with sublime assurance.

"Father, let me introduce Mr. Smith."

"Smith!"

Nigel opened his mouth to speak, but the words stuck to his tongue.

"You know about Mr. Smith," continued Tony, "how helpful he was at East Grinstead——"

"He told you his name was Smith, did he?"

"Of course. I know him quite well now—he lives at Fan's Court, near Blindley Heath, and . . ." Tony's voice trailed off. She wondered why Mr. Smith did not speak for himself.

"You damn liar!" roared Strife, swinging round on Nigel.

"Father!"

"Sir Gambier, let me explain. . . ."

"I won't hear a word. Explanation, indeed! What explanation can there be?—you victimiser of innocent little girls!—Antoinette, get into the car at once, and come home. Then we'll hear all the lies this Furlonger's been cramming you with."

"Furlonger . . ."

The word came in a long gasp.

"Yes—Furlonger. That's his name. 'Smith,' indeed!"

"Father, he isn't Furlonger. Furlonger was quite different, short and dark and dirty-looking."

"I tell you this is Furlonger—and he's quite dirty-looking enough for me. Come along, Antoinette, I won't have you standing here."

"But you aren't Furlonger—are you, Mr. Smith?"

Her voice rang with entreaty and the first horror of doubt. Nigel turned his eyes to hers and tried to plead with them; but they were not understanding—he saw he had only the clumsy weapon of his tongue to fight with.

"I am Furlonger," he said in a low voice.

There was a brief, electric pause. Tony had grown very white.

"Then who was that other man?—Why did you tell me your name was Smith?"

"I've no idea who the other fellow was, and I gave my name as Smith because I felt sure you'd have heard of Furlonger."

"But why—why——"

"Come along, miss," interrupted Sir Gambier. "I won't have you talking to this scoundrel."

"But I want to know why he told me all those lies."

Her face had grown hard as well as white.

"He had very good reasons, I'm sure," sneered Strife.

Nigel suddenly found his tongue.

"Tony!" he cried, "Tony!"

"What damned impudence is this?—'Tony' indeed! You'll not dare address my daughter by that name, sir."

"Tony," repeated Nigel, too desperate to realise what he was calling her. "I swear I never meant you any harm. I know it looks like it—but you mustn't think so. I wanted to be your friend because—because you didn't know of my disgrace, you treated me like a human being. You talked to me about simple things—you made me feel good

and clean when I was with you. That's why I 'told you all these lies.'"

The girl began to tremble. Sir Gambier laughed.

"Tony—don't forsake me."

"Hold your tongue, sir," thundered Strife. "I won't have any more of this. Get into the car, Antoinette."

He touched her arm, and for the first time she responded. She turned and climbed into the car, still trembling, her head bowed, tears on her cheek.

Nigel sprang on to the step.

"Tony—can't you forgive me? I didn't deceive you from any wrong motive. Why do you look like that? Is it because I've been in prison?—I —I suffered there. . . ."

"Oh don't!" gasped the girl, "don't speak to me—I can't bear it. I—I'm so dreadfully—disappointed."

His eyes searched her face for some pity or understanding. Instead he saw only horror, pain, and something akin to fright.

"Don't!" she repeated.

Then he suddenly realised that she was too young to understand.

He fell back from the step, and covered his eyes.

Sir Gambier sprang into the driver's seat. Tony did not speak again. Her father took the steering-wheel, and the car throbbed away into the dusk. She made no protest, and only once looked back —at the man who still stood in the middle of the lane, with his hands over his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

DISILLUSION AT SIXTEEN

RATHER to Tony's surprise, she and her father drove in silence. As a matter of fact, Sir Gambier was baffled by his younger daughter. Awdrey he could have dealt with easily enough—he was used to Awdrey's scrapes. But Tony had always been more or less impersonal—a vague some one for whom one paid school-bills, who came home for the holidays, made herself pretty scarce, and then went back to school again, to write prim letters home every Sunday. It was a new idea that this half-realised being should suddenly show herself possessed of a personality in the form of a scrape —and such a scrape too! Furlonger! He grunted with fury, but—as would never have been the case if he had had Awdrey to deal with—he said nothing.

Once, however, he looked sideways, and noticed how Tony was sitting. Her back was bent, and her arms rested on her knees, the hands clenched between them; her chin was a little thrust forward into the darkness through which they rushed.

At last they reached Shovelstrode. The moon was high above the pines, and they seemed to be waving in waters of silver. The house-front shimmered in the white light, as the motor pulsed up to it. Tony climbed down, and stood stiffly on the step.

"You'd better go to your room," said Sir Gambier in muddled rage. "I—I expect your mother will want to speak to you."

"Very well," said Tony.

She walked quickly upstairs, went into her room, and sat down on the bed. A square of moonlight lay on the floor, and the moving shadows curtsied across it. They and the pines outside seemed to be nodding to her grotesquely under the moon—they seemed to be mocking her for her great illusion lost.

"Furlonger . . ." she repeated to herself. "Furlonger. . . ."

A sick quake of rage was in her heart. Her feelings were still confused, but definite grievances stood out of the jumble. This man whom she had thought so much of—in school-girl language "had a rave on"—had deceived her, told her lies, acted them, and won by them . . . well, the horrible thing was that she did not really know how much or how little he had won.

But worse still was the realisation that he had made her do unconsciously something she thought wrong. Like most girls of her age she had a cast-iron code of morals. When a school-girl sets out to be moral, there is no professor of ethics or minister of religion that can touch her—her morality has behind it all the enormous force of inexperience, it can neither stretch nor bend, and it breaks only at the risk of her whole spiritual life.

She was horrified to think she had given her friendship to a scoundrel, even though she had

done it ignorantly. It was like befriending a girl who cheated or told tales. For her his crime had no attraction or interest—it was just a hideous blot and defilement. She had often heard the Wickham Rubber scandal discussed, and now storehoused memories came to appal her. Hundreds of people, most of them already poor, had been ruined and plunged into misery—widows with growing families, elderly spinsters with hard-gathered savings, poor old men with the terror of the workhouse closing on them with age, had trusted this Furlonger once and execrated him now. He was like that dreadful man in the Psalms, who laid wait to murder the innocent—"he doth ravish the poor when he getteth him into his den." And she had allowed this man to be her friend, she had confided her secrets to him, she had dreamed of him and prayed to meet him. . . . Tony's teeth and hands clenched, and her eyes grew miserable and hard.

Then she began to wonder what had made Furlonger want her friendship. What had he and she in common? Somehow she could not for a moment believe that he had sought her out from unworthy motives. The fact would always remain that he had wanted her friendship, that he had not given her a word which was not kind or courteous, that he had come to her rescue in her hour of need . . . the tears rushed to her eyes; that was the bitterest part of all—her memories of his kindliness and knight-errantry—pictures of East Grinstead, Swites Wood, Brambletye, Lingfield Park, and that little old cottage by Goatsluck Farm. Sud-

denly she found herself making up her mind not to join her father and mother in condemning him. She would take his part in the scene which she knew was at hand.

She soon heard her father calling her, and went down. He pointed into her mother's boudoir, a small room with French windows opening on the lawn. It was full of vague furniture and vague mixed colours, and it seemed to Tony as if she were swimming through it up to the couch where her mother lay. It never struck her as strange that her father should seem unable to deal with her himself, but should hand her over to this weak invalid, who lay with closed eyes in the lamplight.

"Now, I don't want a scene," she said, without opening them.

"Tony won't make a scene," said Sir Gambier; "she's a deep one."

"Oh, Antoinette," sighed Lady Strife—"I never was so surprised in my life as when I heard of your deceit."

"My deceit!" said Tony quickly.

"Yes—going about with a man like Furlonger, and hiding it from your father and mother—don't you call that deceit?"

"I didn't know he was Furlonger."

"But you knew it was wrong to have a secret friendship with any man whatsoever. I never heard of such a thing in a young girl of your age and position—it's what housemaids do, and not nice housemaids at that."

"Mother," cried Tony, her voice shaking unexpectedly, "it was an adventure."

"A what!" shouted Sir Gambier.

His wife winced.

"Don't startle me, dear. And let the child say what she likes—I'm glad she has a theory to explain her actions."

Strife muttered something unintelligible, but made no more interruptions.

"Now tell me, Antoinette," said her mother, "exactly how long you have known this man—and what have you and he been doing together?"

"Mother, I can't explain. I know it sounds deceitful and caddish and all that, but it—it wasn't. It was an adventure, just as I've said. I've *done* something."

The invalid smiled distantly.

"When you are older you will realise the superiority of thought to action. The soul is built of thoughts—actions harden and coarsen it. But we won't discuss that now. Tell me how you and he got to know each other."

"He was the man who was so splendid at East Grinstead station. He told me his name was Smith, because, of course, he didn't want me to know who he really was. Then I met him one morning when I was giving Prince a run in Swites Wood, and then another time when I'd punctured my bicycle, and . . ."

"Go on, Antoinette."

"Oh, you'll never understand. But he was so different from any one else I'd met. He spoke so differently—about such different things——"

"I can imagine that."

"But he wasn't horrid, mother—I swear he

dwarfed, red cottages, where the windows gleam like eyes under the steep roof.

"Let's ask there," he said, "perhaps we can have it in the garden."

The labourer's wife was only too glad of a little incident and pence-earning. She laid a table for them by a clump of lilac bushes, now bare. One or two chrysanthemums were still in bloom, and sent their damp sweetness to the meal that Nigel and Tony had together. It was a very plain meal —only bread and butter and tea, but simplicity and bread and butter had now become vital things to Furlonger. Neither he nor Tony spoke much, but their silences were no less happy than the words that broke them.

The sun had set, a hazy crimson smeared the west, and above it hung one or two dim stars. A little cold wind rustled suddenly in the bushes, and fluttered the table-cloth. Tony's face was pale in the twilight, and her eyes looked unnaturally large and dark. Then she and Nigel realised that they were both leaning forward over the table, as if they had something especially important to say to each other. . . .

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"Are you cold?" asked Furlonger awkwardly, and drew back.

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where the ruts and puddles gleamed. An owl called from Ashplats Wood. The November dusk had suddenly become chill. Nigel slipped off his overcoat and wrapped it round Tony.

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"Then who was that other man?—Why did you tell me your name was Smith?"

"I've no idea who the other fellow was, and I gave my name as Smith because I felt sure you'd have heard of Furlonger."

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"Which is the big race?"

"The Lingfield Cup. It's the last—but we'll enjoy the others, even though we've got nothing on 'em."

They enjoyed them thoroughly. Hanging over the rail, their shouts were just as noisy and as desperate as if they had all their possessions at stake. Tony was thrilled to the depths—the clamour and excitement in the betting ring, the odd, disreputable people all round her, surreptitiously exchanging shillings and horses' names—the clanging bell, the shout of "They're off!" the flash of opera-glasses, the mad rush by, the cheers for the winner . . . all plunged her into an orgy of excitement. She felt subtly wicked and daring, and also, when Nigel began to explain the technicalities of racing, infinitely worldly-wise. What would the girls at school say when they found out she knew the meaning of "Ten to one, bar one," or "Money on both ways"? She wrote such phrases down in her "nature note-book," which she carried about with her to record botanical discoveries, birds seen, sunsets, and equally blameless doings.

At last the time came for the Lingfield Cup. Tony's hands began to quiver. Now was the moment when she should actually become a part of that new world swinging round her. She would have her stake in the game—and a big stake too, for half-a-crown meant more than a fortnight's pocket-money. She looked nervously at Mr. Smith.

"We'll see 'em go past before we put our money on," said he, with a calmness she thought unnatural. "You can tell a lot by the way a horse canters up."

They leaned over the rail, and Tony gave a little cry at the first sight of colours coming from the paddock.

"Here they are—oh, what a beautiful horse!"

"A bit short in the leg," said Nigel, "we won't put our money on him."

"What about that bay—the one coming now?"

"He's a good 'un, I should say. That's Milk-O, the favourite."

"Let's back him."

"Wait, here's another. That's Midsummer Moon, the betting's 100 to 1 against him."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that he's a rank outsider."

"Then we mustn't put our money on him."

"I've known outsiders win splendidly, and, of course, if they do, their backers get thundering odds. If we put our money on Milk-O and he wins we're only in for five shillings each, but if Midsummer Moon wins for us, why, we get over twelve pounds."

"Oh!" gasped Tony. Her eyes grew round. "Over twelve pounds"—that would mean all sorts of splendours—a new hockey-stick, a real spliced beauty instead of the silly unspliced thing her father thought "good enough for a girl"; she would be able to get that wonderful illustrated edition of the *Idylls of the King,* which she had seen in Gladys Gates' home and admired so much;

and directly she went back to school she could give a gorgeous midnight feast—a feast of the superior order, with lemonade and veal-and-ham pies, not one of those scratch affairs at which you ate only buns and halfpenny meringues and drank a concoction of acid-drops dissolved in the water-jug.

Nigel saw the enthusiasm growing on her face.

"Well, would you like to put your money on Midsummer Moon? Of course you're more likely to lose, but if you win, you'll make a good thing out of it."

"Do you think he'll win?"

"I can't say—but it's a sporting chance."

"I think it's worth the risk," said Tony in a low, thrilled voice.

He looked at her intently.

"I always like to see any one ready to back an outsider."

"Don't people generally?"

"No—and nor will you, perhaps, when you're older."

She gave him her half-crown, and he disappeared with it into the crowd, having first carefully put her next a group of respectable farmers' wives. In some ways, thought Tony, he was just as particular as father. She wished he would let her go with him into the ring.

He came back in a few moments. Then suddenly the bell clanged.

"They're off!"

Silence dropped on the babel almost discon-

certingly. Opera-glasses flashed towards the start, rows of heads and bodies hung over the rail, Tony's breath came in short gasps, so did Nigel's—he was desperately anxious for that outsider to win. As they had no glasses they could not see which colours led at the bend, but as the horses swung into the straight, there were shouts of "Milk-O! —Milk-O!"

"Damn the brute!" said Nigel, which gave Tony another thrill of new experience. She had actually spent the afternoon with a man who swore!"

"Milk-O!—Milk-O!"

"Spreadeagle!" shouted some one. Then there were more shouts of "Spreadeagle!"

"Milk-O!"—"Spreadeagle!"—the yells were deafening—then suddenly changed into a mixture of cheers and groans, as the favourite dashed by the post.

"And—where's Midsummer Moon?" gasped poor Tony, as the field clattered in.

"Never started, lady," said a stout policeman, who, being drafted in from elsewhere, did not recognise Nigel as the young fellow on ticket-of-leave who came to report himself every month at East Grinstead.

"Oh, dear!" cried Tony, "we've lost our money."

"Never put your money on an outsider, lady," said the stout constable.

Nigel turned to her with an odd, beseeching look in his eyes.

"I'm sorry . . . I'm dreadfully sorry. It's my

fault—if it hadn't been for me you'd have backed the favourite."

"Oh, it doesn't matter the very tiniest bit."

"But I'm so sorry—I feel a beast."

"Please don't. I've enjoyed myself awfully, and it's made the race ever so much more exciting, having some money on it."

"All right!" had been sung out from the weighing-ground, and the crowd was either pressing round the bookies, or dispersing along the course.

"We'd better go, I think," said Nigel, "you mustn't be late home."

"It's been perfectly ripping," and Tony suddenly slipped her warm gloved hand into his. "It was so kind of you to take me."

"But I made you back an outsider."

"Oh, never mind about it—please don't."

She gave his hand a little squeeze as she spoke, and suddenly, over him once again passed that thrill of great simplicity which he had experienced first at Brambletye. He became dumb—quite dumb and simple, with infinite rest in his heart.

They turned to leave, jostling their way through the crowd towards the cinder-track. Soon the clamour and scramble were far behind, and they found the little footpath that ran through the fields near Goatsluck Farm.

"Which way are we going home?" asked Tony.

"We'll have tea before we go home. Will you come with me and have tea in a cottage?"

"Oh, how ripping!..."

Nigel looked round him. A cottage belonging to Goatsluck Farm was close at hand—one of those

dwarfed, red cottages, where the windows gleam like eyes under the steep roof.

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"Hold your tongue, sir," thundered Strife. "I won't have any more of this. Get into the car, Antoinette."

He touched her arm, and for the first time she responded. She turned and climbed into the car, still trembling, her head bowed, tears on her cheek.

Nigel sprang on to the step.

"Tony—can't you forgive me? I didn't deceive you from any wrong motive. Why do you look like that? Is it because I've been in prison?—I —I suffered there. . . ."

"Oh don't!" gasped the girl, "don't speak to me—I can't bear it. I—I'm so dreadfully—disappointed."

His eyes searched her face for some pity or understanding. Instead he saw only horror, pain, and something akin to fright.

"Don't!" she repeated.

Then he suddenly realised that she was too young to understand.

He fell back from the step, and covered his eyes.

Sir Gambier sprang into the driver's seat. Tony did not speak again. Her father took the steering-wheel, and the car throbbed away into the dusk. She made no protest, and only once looked back —at the man who still stood in the middle of the lane, with his hands over his eyes.

"Which is the big race?"

"The Lingfield Cup. It's the last—but we'll enjoy the others, even though we've got nothing on 'em."

They enjoyed them thoroughly. Hanging over the rail, their shouts were just as noisy and as desperate as if they had all their possessions at stake. Tony was thrilled to the depths—the clamour and excitement in the betting ring, the odd, disreputable people all round her, surreptitiously exchanging shillings and horses' names—the clanging bell, the shout of "They're off!" the flash of opera-glasses, the mad rush by, the cheers for the winner . . . all plunged her into an orgy of excitement. She felt subtly wicked and daring, and also, when Nigel began to explain the technicalities of racing, infinitely worldly-wise. What would the girls at school say when they found out she knew the meaning of "Ten to one, bar one," or "Money on both ways"? She wrote such phrases down in her "nature note-book," which she carried about with her to record botanical discoveries, birds seen, sunsets, and equally blameless doings.

At last the time came for the Lingfield Cup. Tony's hands began to quiver. Now was the moment when she should actually become a part of that new world swinging round her. She would have her stake in the game—and a big stake too, for half-a-crown meant more than a fortnight's pocket-money. She looked nervously at Mr. Smith.

"We'll see 'em go past before we put our money on," said he, with a calmness she thought unnatural. "You can tell a lot by the way a horse canters up."

They leaned over the rail, and Tony gave a little cry at the first sight of colours coming from the paddock.

"Here they are—oh, what a beautiful horse!"

"A bit short in the leg," said Nigel, "we won't put our money on him."

"What about that bay—the one coming now?"

"He's a good 'un, I should say. That's Milk-O, the favourite."

"Let's back him."

"Wait, here's another. That's Midsummer Moon, the betting's 100 to 1 against him."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that he's a rank outsider."

"Then we mustn't put our money on him."

"I've known outsiders win splendidly, and, of course, if they do, their backers get thundering odds. If we put our money on Milk-O and he wins we're only in for five shillings each, but if Midsummer Moon wins for us, why, we get over twelve pounds."

"Oh!" gasped Tony. Her eyes grew round. "Over twelve pounds"—that would mean all sorts of splendours—a new hockey-stick, a real spliced beauty instead of the silly unspliced thing her father thought "good enough for a girl"; she would be able to get that wonderful illustrated edition of the *Idylls of the King,* which she had seen in Gladys Gates' home and admired so much;

and directly she went back to school she could give a gorgeous midnight feast—a feast of the superior order, with lemonade and veal-and-ham pies, not one of those scratch affairs at which you ate only buns and halfpenny meringues and drank a concoction of acid-drops dissolved in the water-jug.

Nigel saw the enthusiasm growing on her face.

"Well, would you like to put your money on Midsummer Moon? Of course you're more likely to lose, but if you win, you'll make a good thing out of it."

"Do you think he'll win?"

"I can't say—but it's a sporting chance."

"I think it's worth the risk," said Tony in a low, thrilled voice.

He looked at her intently.

"I always like to see any one ready to back an outsider."

"Don't people generally?"

"No—and nor will you, perhaps, when you're older."

She gave him her half-crown, and he disappeared with it into the crowd, having first carefully put her next a group of respectable farmers' wives. In some ways, thought Tony, he was just as particular as father. She wished he would let her go with him into the ring.

He came back in a few moments. Then suddenly the bell clanged.

"They're off!"

Silence dropped on the babel almost discon-

certingly. Opera-glasses flashed towards the start, rows of heads and bodies hung over the rail, Tony's breath came in short gasps, so did Nigel's—he was desperately anxious for that outsider to win. As they had no glasses they could not see which colours led at the bend, but as the horses swung into the straight, there were shouts of "Milk-O! —Milk-O!"

"Damn the brute!" said Nigel, which gave Tony another thrill of new experience. She had actually spent the afternoon with a man who swore!"

"Milk-O!—Milk-O!"

"Spreadeagle!" shouted some one. Then there were more shouts of "Spreadeagle!"

"Milk-O!"—"Spreadeagle!"—the yells were deafening—then suddenly changed into a mixture of cheers and groans, as the favourite dashed by the post.

"And—where's Midsummer Moon?" gasped poor Tony, as the field clattered in.

"Never started, lady," said a stout policeman, who, being drafted in from elsewhere, did not recognise Nigel as the young fellow on ticket-of-leave who came to report himself every month at East Grinstead.

"Oh, dear!" cried Tony, "we've lost our money."

"Never put your money on an outsider, lady," said the stout constable.

Nigel turned to her with an odd, beseeching look in his eyes.

"I'm sorry . . . I'm dreadfully sorry. It's my

fault—if it hadn't been for me you'd have backed the favourite."

"Oh, it doesn't matter the very tiniest bit."

"But I'm so sorry—I feel a beast."

"Please don't. I've enjoyed myself awfully, and it's made the race ever so much more exciting, having some money on it."

"All right!" had been sung out from the weighing-ground, and the crowd was either pressing round the bookies, or dispersing along the course.

"We'd better go, I think," said Nigel, "you mustn't be late home."

"It's been perfectly ripping," and Tony suddenly slipped her warm gloved hand into his. "It was so kind of you to take me."

"But I made you back an outsider."

"Oh, never mind about it—please don't."

She gave his hand a little squeeze as she spoke, and suddenly, over him once again passed that thrill of great simplicity which he had experienced first at Brambletye. He became dumb—quite dumb and simple, with infinite rest in his heart.

They turned to leave, jostling their way through the crowd towards the cinder-track. Soon the clamour and scramble were far behind, and they found the little footpath that ran through the fields near Goatsluck Farm.

"Which way are we going home?" asked Tony.

"We'll have tea before we go home. Will you come with me and have tea in a cottage?"

"Oh, how ripping!..."

Nigel looked round him. A cottage belonging to Goatsluck Farm was close at hand—one of those

dwarfed, red cottages, where the windows gleam like eyes under the steep roof.

"Let's ask there," he said, "perhaps we can have it in the garden."

The labourer's wife was only too glad of a little incident and pence-earning. She laid a table for them by a clump of lilac bushes, now bare. One or two chrysanthemums were still in bloom, and sent their damp sweetness to the meal that Nigel and Tony had together. It was a very plain meal —only bread and butter and tea, but simplicity and bread and butter had now become vital things to Furlonger. Neither he nor Tony spoke much, but their silences were no less happy than the words that broke them.

The sun had set, a hazy crimson smeared the west, and above it hung one or two dim stars. A little cold wind rustled suddenly in the bushes, and fluttered the table-cloth. Tony's face was pale in the twilight, and her eyes looked unnaturally large and dark. Then she and Nigel realised that they were both leaning forward over the table, as if they had something especially important to say to each other. . . .

The wind dropped suddenly, and the fogs swept up and veiled the stars. The crimson deepened to purple in the west.

"Are you cold?" asked Furlonger awkwardly, and drew back.

"No, thank you," said Tony, and leaned back too.

A few minutes later they rose to go. It was half-past five, and strange shadows were in the lanes,

where the ruts and puddles gleamed. An owl called from Ashplats Wood. The November dusk had suddenly become chill. Nigel slipped off his overcoat and wrapped it round Tony.

"I don't want it," he insisted. "Oh, what a funny little thing you look!"

"It comes down right over my heels—it's ripping and warm."

They walked on in silence for about a quarter of a mile. Then the distant throbbing of a car troubled the evening. It drew nearer, and they stood aside to let it pass them in the narrow lane.

But instead of passing, it pulled up suddenly, and out jumped Sir Gambier Strife.

Their surprise and dismay were so great that for a time they could not use their tongues. Sir Gambier stood before them, his face flushed, his mouth a little open, while the dusk and the arc-lights of the huge motor had games with his figure, making it seem monstrous and misshapen.

"Father——" began Tony, and then stopped. She was really the least disconcerted of the three, for she had only Mr. Smith to deal with—surely the presence of such a knight could easily be explained and forgiven. But the other two had to face the complication of Furlonger.

"What the——" broke from Strife, after the time-honoured formula of the man who wants to swear, but objects on principle to swearing before women.

The colour mounted on Nigel's face, from his neck to his cheeks, from his cheeks to his forehead —and gradually his head drooped.

Tony turned to him with sublime assurance.

"Father, let me introduce Mr. Smith."

"Smith!"

Nigel opened his mouth to speak, but the words stuck to his tongue.

"You know about Mr. Smith," continued Tony, "how helpful he was at East Grinstead——"

"He told you his name was Smith, did he?"

"Of course. I know him quite well now—he lives at Fan's Court, near Blindley Heath, and . . ." Tony's voice trailed off. She wondered why Mr. Smith did not speak for himself.

"You damn liar!" roared Strife, swinging round on Nigel.

"Father!"

"Sir Gambier, let me explain. . . ."

"I won't hear a word. Explanation, indeed! What explanation can there be?—you victimiser of innocent little girls!—Antoinette, get into the car at once, and come home. Then we'll hear all the lies this Furlonger's been cramming you with."

"Furlonger . . ."

The word came in a long gasp.

"Yes—Furlonger. That's his name. 'Smith,' indeed!"

"Father, he isn't Furlonger. Furlonger was quite different, short and dark and dirty-looking."

"I tell you this is Furlonger—and he's quite dirty-looking enough for me. Come along, Antoinette, I won't have you standing here."

"But you aren't Furlonger—are you, Mr. Smith?"

Her voice rang with entreaty and the first horror of doubt. Nigel turned his eyes to hers and tried to plead with them; but they were not understanding—he saw he had only the clumsy weapon of his tongue to fight with.

"I am Furlonger," he said in a low voice.

There was a brief, electric pause. Tony had grown very white.

"Then who was that other man?—Why did you tell me your name was Smith?"

"I've no idea who the other fellow was, and I gave my name as Smith because I felt sure you'd have heard of Furlonger."

"But why—why——"

"Come along, miss," interrupted Sir Gambier. "I won't have you talking to this scoundrel."

"But I want to know why he told me all those lies."

Her face had grown hard as well as white.

"He had very good reasons, I'm sure," sneered Strife.

Nigel suddenly found his tongue.

"Tony!" he cried, "Tony!"

"What damned impudence is this?—'Tony' indeed! You'll not dare address my daughter by that name, sir."

"Tony," repeated Nigel, too desperate to realise what he was calling her. "I swear I never meant you any harm. I know it looks like it—but you mustn't think so. I wanted to be your friend because—because you didn't know of my disgrace, you treated me like a human being. You talked to me about simple things—you made me feel good

and clean when I was with you. That's why I 'told you all these lies.'"

The girl began to tremble. Sir Gambier laughed.

"Tony—don't forsake me."

"Hold your tongue, sir," thundered Strife. "I won't have any more of this. Get into the car, Antoinette."

He touched her arm, and for the first time she responded. She turned and climbed into the car, still trembling, her head bowed, tears on her cheek.

Nigel sprang on to the step.

"Tony—can't you forgive me? I didn't deceive you from any wrong motive. Why do you look like that? Is it because I've been in prison?—I —I suffered there. . . ."

"Oh don't!" gasped the girl, "don't speak to me—I can't bear it. I—I'm so dreadfully—disappointed."

His eyes searched her face for some pity or understanding. Instead he saw only horror, pain, and something akin to fright.

"Don't!" she repeated.

Then he suddenly realised that she was too young to understand.

He fell back from the step, and covered his eyes.

Sir Gambier sprang into the driver's seat. Tony did not speak again. Her father took the steering-wheel, and the car throbbed away into the dusk. She made no protest, and only once looked back —at the man who still stood in the middle of the lane, with his hands over his eyes.

nor make-believe, only wet winds and winter desolation.

He came to Dormans Land. The blinds were down, and through the chinks he saw the leap and spurt of firelight. He stood where three roads met, and the wind swept up from Lingfield, where the first stars had hung their lanterns. He began to play—a dreary, springless tune, that struck cold into the hearts of the few it reached through their closed windows. He played the song of Christmas as Nature keeps it—the festival of life's drowning and despair.

No children came to dance. They were happy beside their parents, with sweets and crackers and fun. They were keeping Christmas as man keeps it, and drew down the blinds on Nature keeping it outside, and the lone fiddler who felt it more congenial to keep it with Nature than to keep it with men.

Nigel stopped playing and looked around him into the gloom. He felt disappointed because the children had not come to dance. He had broken away from his brother and sister because he wanted those dancing children so badly—and they had not come. Perhaps he had better go further up into the village, since the children were not playing in the street as usual, but in their homes.

So he went up, and stood between the church and the Royal Oak. The place seemed deserted—only a great, empty car stood outside the inn. Nigel began to play, but again there was no response. The darkness came fluttering towards

him from the back streets of the village, and seemed to creep right into his heart.

Then suddenly it struck him that he played too doleful a tune for the children. They liked lively airs—they found it hard to dance to those bizarre mournful extempores of his. So he started "O Caro Nome," and when that had jigged and rippled to an end, he played airs from Flotow's *Martha,* and then his old favourite, "I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls."

The street was still empty. From a cottage close by came the wheeze of a harmonium. He stood drearily snapping the strings with his fingers. Then suddenly he realised how ridiculous he was —playing in the village street, in the damp and the cold and the dark, when he ought to be at home, eating and drinking and singing and joking because Christ was born in a manger.

He turned away—he was a fool. Why did he like seeing children dance?—why did it hurt him so that they were better employed to-day? He did not know. His life, his emotions, his heart, were like the twilight, a dark and cheerless mystery. He could not understand half what he felt in his own breast. He was himself only a child dancing in the dusk, to an unknown fiddler playing a half-comprehended tune.

The next moment he heard the inn door open behind him, and turning round saw a short, broad figure on the doorstep, wrapped in an enormous motor-coat.

"Will you not play something else?"

The words came heavily, with a teutonic lumber.

Nigel saw a round, florid face, and dark, very close-cropped hair.

He hesitated—perhaps the stranger was making game of him.

"I have been listening to you for some time, and now I have come to see you. I am surprised. I do not think you are a beggar."

"Not quite," said Nigel.

"Well, play some more."

Again Furlonger hesitated. Then he hoisted his fiddle to his shoulder with a short, rather grating, laugh.

He played the Requiem from *Il Trovatore*.

There was silence. The darkness seemed to pass in waves over the sky, each wave engulfing it deeper. The wind sobbed a strange little tune in the eaves of the inn.

"You have tortured my ears," said the stranger. Nigel flushed angrily—so after all the idea had been to make game of him—"with your damned Verdi."

"How do you mean?"

"You are too good to play Verdi."

"Oh!"

"What are your favourite composers?"

"Gounod—Verdi—Balfe——"

"Ai! Ai! Ach!" and the stranger put his hands over his ears.

Nigel was beginning to be faintly amused.

"Well, what's the matter with 'em?"

"The matter?—they are dead."

"That'll be the matter with us all, sooner or later."

"Let us hope it will be sooner for some of us."

Nigel looked into the stranger's face, and again experienced a slight shock of surprise. The eyes in the midst of its florid circumference were haunted with despair, grief-stricken and appealing. He suddenly realised that it was not normal for a man to spend Christmas day in lonely petrol prowlings.

"Play some more."

"I can only play Verdi and Balfe and those others."

"Well, I'll try to endure it."

"Look here," said Furlonger, "what's your game? Why should you want me to play when you hate my music?"

"I hate your music, but I like your playing. You are a wonderful player."

"Oh, rats!" and Nigel felt angry, he did not know why.

"I repeat—you are a wonderful player. Who taught you?"

"Carl Hauptmann."

"Hauptmann!—he was a pupil of mine."

"Then you're Eitel von Gleichroeder!"

"I am."

Nigel looked interested. Memories of his life in London revived—music lessons, concerts, musical jargon, a lost world in which he had once lived, but had now almost forgotten. He seemed to hear Hauptmann's strange, coughing laugh as he chid his pupil for what von Gleichroeder had just chidden him now—his abominable taste. "You are hobeless, hobeless—you and your Balfe and

your Bellini and your odder vons." Von Gleichroeder he knew would take an even more serious view of the case, as he had a reputation for ultra-modernism in music. Hauptmann's contempt for Balfe and Bellini he carried on to Verdi and Gounod, even Tschaikowsky, while though he was obliged to grant Beethoven supremacy with a grudge, he passed over his works in favour of those of Scriabin, d'Indy, Debussy and Strauss.

"Well, well," said the musician, "play *Zampa,* play *Lucia di Lammermoor,* play *La Somnambula* —any abomination you please—but play."

Nigel, with rather an evil grin, played *Zampa.*

"Why do you like those things?"

"Because they are pretty tunes."

"Ach!—and why do you like pretty tunes?"

Nigel stared at him full of hostility, then his manner changed.

"Because they remind me of—of things I used to feel."

He realised dimly that there was a subtle freemasonry between him and this man. In a way it drew them together, in a way it held them apart.

"What you used to feel. So! that is better. It's your heart they tickle, not your ears."

Furlonger nodded.

"Do you play for your living?"

"No—I am a farmer."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I play for children to dance."

Von Gleichroeder looked round, and shrugged his shoulders. He did not seem particularly surprised.

"Would you not like to play for grown-up children to dance? For fashionable society to crowd to hear you, and gather round you like children round a barrel-organ?"

"Fashionable society won't waste much of its time on me. I've been in prison three years for bogus company promoting."

"So! But that is good. Without that attraction you could fill the Bechstein, but with it you can fill the Albert Hall."

"Gammon."

"Not at all. My dear young man, I see a glorious future ahead of you, if you will only trouble to secure it. Come to London and study music——"

"Please don't talk nonsense."

"It is not nonsense. You are wonderfully gifted. I don't say you are a genius, for you are not—but you are wonderfully gifted, and your history will make you interesting to the ladies. With your talent and your history and—and your face, you ought to do really well, if only some enterprising person would take you in hand."

"Which isn't likely."

"I beg your pardon—it is most likely. *I* will do it."

Nigel was more surprised than grateful.

"No, thank you."

"Do not be proud. It is purely a business offer. I expect to make money out of you, and—what do you call it?—credit. Listen here—if you cannot pay my fees, I will give you a year's tuition free of charge, on condition that I have a percentage on

your salaries during the next five years. That is a generous offer—many a young man would give much to have me for professor."

Nigel shook his head.

"Thanks awfully—but I'm not keen on it."

"And why?"

"Well, for one thing, I don't want to make my stinking past into an advertisement, and for another I don't want to go back to prison."

"Prison!—that is a strange name for fame and big salaries."

"I'm not thinking of those so much as of what must come before them—all the grind and slavery. My music's the only part of me that has never been in prison, and if I make a trade and treadmill out of it, I shall be degrading it just as I have degraded everything else about me."

"It will not be degradation—on the contrary."

"And I don't believe I shall ever make myself a name."

"That remains to be seen. I don't expect you to become world-famous, but there is no reason why you should not be exceedingly successful in England, where no one bothers very much about taste or technique. Taste you have none, technique—— Lord help us!—but temperament—ach, temperament! You have suffered—hein?"

Nigel coloured. He could not answer—because he felt this man had suffered too.

"Of course, you have suffered—you could not play like that if you had not. Without your suffering you would be a clever amateur—just that. But now, because you have suffered, you are

something more. 'Wer nie sein Brod mit Thränen ass'—you doubtless know our Goethe's wonderful lines. So"—and his dark, restless eyes looked up almost imploringly to the sky—"sorrow has one use in this world."

There was another pause. The village was quite dark now—lights twinkled. High above the frosty exhalations of the dusk, piling walls of smoke-scented mist round the cottages, the stars shone like the lights of celestial villages, dotting the dark country of the sky. The Wain hung tilted in the north, lonely and ominous, Betelgeuse was bright above Sussex, Aldebaran burned luminous and lonely in his quarter. Nigel watched the Sign of Virgo, which had just risen, and glowed over the woods of Langerish. It flickered like candles in the wind. Then he dropped his eyes to the darkness round him, and through it came the creak of a harmonium.

"Well?" said von Gleichroeder.

"Well?"

"Will you accept my offer?"

"No, thank you."

"Why?"

"I've given you my reasons." The subtle sense of hostility put insolence into his voice.

"They are no reasons."

"They are mine."

The foreigner shrugged his shoulders.

"So be it. I have made my offer—you have refused it. It is your own concern."

He took out his card-case, and presented his card to Furlonger.

"In case you change your mind."

This was anti-climax, and Nigel felt irritated.

"I'm not in the habit of changing my mind."

"Just as you please," and von Gleichroeder put back the card-case in his pocket.

"Good evening," he added politely.

"Good evening," mumbled Furlonger.

He turned away, and walked down the village to where the foot-path to Wilderwick striped the fields. At the stile he paused, and realised that he had been exceptionally insolent.

CHAPTER XIV

WOODS AT DAWN

NIGEL reached home only half-an-hour before supper-time. Len and Janey did not receive him cordially, but he was too much preoccupied with his adventure to notice their coldness or take their hints. He poured it all out at the evening meal —the subtle sense of outrage which for some unknown reason von Gleichroeder's offer had stirred up, contending in his voice with a ridiculous, childish pride.

Len and Janey were unfeignedly surprised. It had never occurred to them that Nigel's playing was even tolerable—they had sometimes liked it in the distance, that was all.

"Fancy his wanting you to go and study in London," said Janey. "I'm glad you refused."

"So'm I."

"It would have been beastly losing you again, old man—we haven't had you back three months."

"Wouldn't you like to see me fill the Albert Hall?"

"Well—er—if you could really do it, it might be interesting to watch—just for once in a way. But I don't see that it would be worth breaking up the 'appy 'ome, only for that."

Nigel would have liked them to be more impressed, but they voiced his own feelings exactly.

"No—nor do I. Well, I've settled the old

geyser, anyway—and now let's forget all about him."

Which they did at once.

That night Nigel had restless dreams. He dreamed he was playing to crowded audiences in great nightmare-like halls that stretched away to infinity. The circumstances were always unfavourable—sometimes he would have only one string on his violin, and sometimes he would find himself struggling with some horrible dream-begotten instrument with as many strings as a harp. Once he dreamed that all the audience got up and danced a hideous rigadoon, another time they all had the same face—a dark, florid face that leered.

Towards morning he dreamed a quieter dream. He was playing in a very large place, but he had a rational instrument, and he was playing "I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls." The melody floated all through his dreams—the same as in waking hours, and yet not quite the same—celestial, rarefied, wistful in heart and ears. He was also conscious of a presence—he knew he was near Tony Strife; he felt her close to him, and it was magic in his blood. The melody drifted on—sometimes pouring out of his violin, sometimes seeming to come from very far away.

> "And I also dreamed, which pleased me most,
> That you loved me still the same . . ."

The music ceased abruptly, and he dropped his bow, looking round to see Tony. She was not there; the great hall was empty—nothing but

empty seats stretching away into dimness—except that in the front row of all sat two figures huddled together. He looked down at them, and at first he did not know them, then he saw that they were Len and Janey, staring up at him with hungry, loving eyes. . . .

He woke and sat up, shivering a little. It must be late, for the winter sky was white beyond the woods. Yet he did not feel inclined to rise. He lay back, and folded his hands behind his head, staring out at the dull line of brown that lay against the quivering, dawn-filled clouds.

Those woods always put strange thoughts into his head. They made him think of his own life, lonely, windy and sere. But some day the spring would throb in them, their branches would shine with green, their thickets would thrill with song; in their waste, desolate places primroses would push through the dead leaves of last year. . . . He sat up again with a jerk—for the first time he realised that the woods would not be always brown.

The thought gave him a faint shock of surprise. Ever since the day he left prison he had looked out on brown woods, rocked by autumn and winter winds, so that he had almost forgotten that autumn and winter would not last for ever. He had never thought of spring, of March and tender green, of April and first flowers, of sweet, quickening rains, and winds full of warmth and the scent of young leaves. It was strange that he should have forgotten spring.

Now in the darkest day of the year, spring held out its promise to the woods—and to him. The

yellow of a hidden sunrise was filling the clouds like hope unbounded—and Nigel's dream came back to him, his dream of marble halls and of love that was "still the same." He saw himself playing to thronged audiences, with Tony close to him, unseen, intangible, but there—with all the sweet memories of Lingfield and Brambletye revived and re-established, her friendship, candour, and tenderness "still the same."

Then he understood. Gulfs unbridgeable might lie between the convict with his stained and broken life and the simple little schoolgirl of Shovelstrode. But the well-known violinist who played for "big salaries," who "filled the Albert Hall." . . . A terrible thing had happened to Nigel—he had begun to hope. When hope has been a long time away, the return of it is like the return of sensation to a frost-bitten limb. It pricks, it burns, it tortures. It tortured Nigel till a cry of anguish burst from him, bitterer than in any of his fits of despair. He bent forward, clapping his hand to his side.

Hope showed him the doors of his prison flung wide at last. For long years he had never dreamed of escape, he was a captive, so fast in prison that he could not get forth—free only among the dead. But now the doors were open and he could go out. His music would raise him up out of the pit, bring him back to an earth washed in rain and spring, to touch the trembling innocence of the lilies, and drink the sweetness of the eternal May.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!—I want to be free! I want to be free!"

The cry was not a prayer so much as the cry of his great hunger, finding voice at last—"I want to be free! I want to be free!"

His mind dropped hastily to practical details. He had seen von Gleichroeder's address on his card, and that tough memory of his, which was sometimes a curse to him, held it fast. He would write and tell him he had changed his mind. It would be humiliating, but it must be done. Then he would go to London, and work—and work. It was not only the topmost pinnacle that could lift him out of his old life, the name he would make for himself need not be a great name—as long as it was a fair name. That was what he wanted, and would struggle for—a fair name. Hard work, an honest livelihood, self-denial, constant communion with the beautiful and inspired, would purge his soul of its defilement. The hideous stain of his crime would be wiped off. When he had lived for years in poverty and honesty, when he had brought by his music a little sunshine into poor lives like those he had smitten, when the fields of three counties had ceased to reproach him for his treachery, and the name of Furlonger had some faint lustre from his bearing it—then he would be free. And when he was free he would allow himself—not to claim Tony's friendship or anything else beyond him, but just to think of her—think of her with hope.

Oh, Tony, little Tony! his little love!

For weeks now he had known that he loved her. Though he had never dared think of her as a woman, he wanted her. He had wanted

women before, he had had his adventures with them—though not perhaps as many as the average man—but they had all been stale and ordinary, the stock line, the job lot, which eager, extravagant youth pays high for as a novelty. Now he had something new. He loved a little girl, scarcely more than a child, parted from him by a dozen barriers of his own erecting. He loved her because she was good and innocent, and had given him perfect comradeship; most of all he loved her because of the barriers between them, because she lived utterly apart from him, in a foreign land of liberty and hope and uprightness, towards which he must strive hourly if he were to gain even the frontiers.

He scowled a little. He was not blind, and he knew that he would have to go into slavery, perhaps for a long time, before this new freedom was won. Even in an hour he had been able to see that von Gleichroeder was a technique-fiend, and would make matters hot for his clumsy pupil. He also realized that though the German had borne good humouredly with his insolence, he would not be so patient when he became his master. Yes—he would have a master—he would have to practise scales and exercises—he would be reprimanded, lectured, ordered about. Herr von Gleichroeder would be his master, and the tacit sympathy between them would but make their relations more galling.

There would be other sacrifices too. He would have to say good-bye to Sparrow Hall, and to Len and Janey. He caught his breath—God! how

he loved Len and Janey! He had been brutal and heartless to them again and again, but he loved them with a love that was half pain in its intensity. He would have to be away from them perhaps for years. Yet when he came back he would bring them a gift—the same gift that he would bring Tony—a fair name. That was what he owed every one—the world, his brother and sister, his little love.

The very fact that he was taking his "stinking past" with him into the future would to some extent remove its offensiveness. It was all very well to talk of "starting afresh under another name." What he wanted was to raise his old name —the name of Furlonger—out of the dust. The convict should not just quietly disappear, he should be transfigured into the artist, publicly, before the whole world. As his degradation had been public, the comment of cheap newspapers, so should his exaltation.

A thundering knock at the door broke into his dreams.

"Nigel, in the devil's name, get up!—breakfast's waiting."

The next moment Len was in the room, tearing the bed-clothes off him.

"You *are* a fat lot of use on the farm!—I've got through half the morning's work without you."

"Then you won't miss me so much when I'm gone."

"Gone where?"

"To London."

Nigel began to dress himself—Len stared at him gaping.

"To London! why, you aren't going there, are you?"

"I am."

"To that man von what's-his-name?"

"Of course."

Len stared harder than ever. Then he suddenly lost his temper.

"'Of course'!—there's no 'of course' about it—except 'of course not.' Why, you told him you wouldn't hear of such a thing."

"But I may change my mind, mayn't I?"

"No—you mayn't. Look here, Nigel, you've led sister and self an infernal dance for the last three months. Can't you chuck it?"

"I'm going to chuck it—by leaving this place."

Leonard saw his brother was in earnest. He came quickly towards him, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"What have we done to upset you, old man?"

"Nothing—you've always been sports."

"Then why are you going?"

Nigel hestitated. He could not bring himself to tell even this brother of his sacred, half-formed plans.

"You won't miss me," he faltered.

"Won't miss you! Won't miss you!—what the devil d'you mean?"

"I'm no use on the farm—I laze and I slack. You'll get on much better without me."

"Gammon! You're tumbling into it nicely, and if you go, I'll have to hire a man—and there'll be the expense of your keep in London. No, no, old chap—that won't wash."

"Wait till you've tried it."

"Haven't I been trying it for three years? Besides, my boy, this is only beating round the bush. The main fact is that Janey and I would miss you simply damnably."

"Not really," said Nigel, his mouth drooping with a great tenderness, "you'd soon feel the relief of being rid of me and my tantrums."

There was a knock at the door.

"That's Janey," cried Len. "Come in, old girl —I want you."

Janey came in. Nigel was nearly dressed, and had begun to shave.

"Breakfast's——" began Janey.

"Yes—I know all about breakfast. That isn't what's the matter. Len wants you to join him in trying to persuade me not to go to London."

"But you're not going to London! . . ."

"I'm writing this morning to von Gleichroeder to say I've changed my mind."

"No! . . . Nigel!" cried Janey.

For a moment she stood as if paralyzed, then suddenly she darted towards him, and flung her arms round him, looking up beseechingly into his face.

"Nigel! no!—you mustn't leave us—I can't bear it. Oh, say you won't!"

"Damn you, Janey!—can't you see I've got a razor in my hand?"

She was taking it even worse than he had expected. She seemed actually terrified.

"I can't live here without you," she cried brokenly, "indeed I can't."

He gently disengaged himself.

"Most people's difficulty," he said, deliberately lathering his chin, "has not been how to live without me, but how to live with me."

"But I can't live without you."

"You've got Len."

"But he's only—only half."

"The better half. I'm a rotten lot, Janey. You'll be far happier when I'm gone. I'm a sulky brute—don't contradict me; I know it. I'm a sulky, bad-tempered brute. Again and again I've spoiled your happiness and the lad's—I've done nothing but snap and snarl at you, and I've gone whining about the place when you wanted to be cheerful. You've both been utter sports to put up with me so long—you'll notice the difference when I'm away, if you can't realise it now."

Janey was sitting on the bed, drowned in tears.

"Aren't you happy with us?" asked Leonard.

"Hardly—or I shouldn't be going."

He spoke with all the exaggerated brutality of the man who sees himself obliged to hurt those he loves.

"It's not your fault," he continued in a gentler voice, "it's mine. I'm such a waster. I'm a miserable, restless rotter, bound to make myself and every one else unhappy. Now if I go to London, I shall work—I shall have something to live for."

"Fame, you mean," sobbed Janey.

"Well, something of that kind."

He had finished shaving, and came and sat down

by her on the bed, forcing her drowned eyes to look into his.

"Janey, don't you want me to be famous? Wouldn't you like to be the sister of a well-known violinist instead of Convict Seventy-six? Wouldn't you like to see me fill the Albert Hall?"

"Fill hell!" shouted Leonard. "D'you really believe all the rot that old bounder spoke?"

"Well, it isn't likely he'd teach me for nothing if he didn't expect to make something out of me."

"Yes—that'll be just what he'll do—and he'll make a fat lot more than you will."

"Oh, don't go!" sobbed Janey.

Nigel looked wretchedly from one to the other.

"Janey," he cried, drawing her close to him, and quivering in the agony of his appeal, "Janey, can't you understand?—I want to start a new life, I want to throw off all my beastly past. I want to make my name—your name—clean and honourable. I dragged it into the mud, and I must pull it out again. Oh, I've suffered so, Janey. I can't get out of prison, I feel more helplessly shut up than ever I did at Parkhurst. But now I—can be —free."

The last words burst from him in a choking cry. He flung himself back from her, and looked into her eyes. Then he was surprised, for he saw in them, swimming in tears, a glimmer of understanding.

"Janey," he continued, putting his lips close to her face, and mumbling his appeal almost incoherently, "I can't expect you to grasp all that this means to me. You're good, you're pure—you

don't know what it is to have a horrible stain on your heart, which all your tears don't seem able to wash away. But can't you put yourself for a moment in my place and realise what it is to hunger for a decent life, to dream of whiteness and purity and innocence, and burn to make them yours?—to be willing to give the whole world—just to be —clean?

"I think I can," said Janey.

CHAPTER XV

THE SERMON ON FORGIVENESS

HALF-AN-HOUR later the three Furlongers sat down to a cold breakfast. They were almost silent, for there was nothing more to be said. The matter was settled. Nigel had found an unexpected ally in Janet, and had carried his point. Directly after breakfast he wrote to von Gleichroeder. It was a difficult letter, for it meant nothing less than eating humble pie, but for that very reason he did not take long over it. An envelope addressed in his large, scrawling hand was soon ready to be posted.

It was a clear, cold day, this feast of Stephen. A frosty sunshine crisped the grass, scattering the damps of yesterday's fog. The lane smelled of frost as Nigel walked up it to the post-office. But he did not see it as it was—in the duress and beggarliness of winter; he saw it as it would be, bursting with spring, full of scent and softness and song. He pictured those naked bushes when spring had clothed them, those grey banks when spring had fired them—the hedges were full of future song, the hollows of primroses to be.

He posted his letter, then stood for a moment, looking southward. The sunshine was so clear that the rims of distant windows gleamed with white across the fields. He could see the windows of Shovelstrode. . . .

Dared he?

After all, he would have to. He could not leave Sparrow Hall without seeing Tony. He would not tell her of her place in his plans, but he owed it to her and to himself that she should think of him as a man living uprightly, striving after honour. Now she was thinking of him as a scoundrel and an outcast—he came into her thoughts with a shudder. It must not be.

At the same time he was afraid. It gave him a strange, cold qualm to think he was afraid of Tony, once his comrade, now his love—but he was. If he meant to see her, he must go at once, before his resolve lost strength with spontaneity. He turned towards the south, where the sunshine lay.

As he came near Shovelstrode his quakings grew. After all, by the time he had made himself worthy to think of her, she would have given herself to another. He could not even hint that he wanted her to wait. He must trust to her aloofness to keep her free, and the memory of their friendship to keep alive in her heart a little spark that he could some day fan into flame. But it was all rather hopeless, a leap in the dark.

Perhaps, even, she would refuse to see him. He remembered the look in her eyes when she had turned from him by Goatsluck Farm. All the steel-cold virtue, all the ignorant horror, all the cruelty of youth had been in that look. Perhaps she had turned from him for ever. Perhaps nothing that he could ever achieve or be would wipe out from her memory his foul betrayal of others and herself.

But he went too far in his fears for utter despair. Reaction set in—hope began once more to lacerate him, and whipped him forward to make his last desperate appeal to the fates that had always hitherto been deaf and blind.

He hesitated a moment when he came to the house. The servants might know who he was and not allow him in, or he might be seen by some of the family. It struck him that he had better go and look for her in the park before risking himself on the doorstep. She had once told him that she often wandered among the pines.

He slipped round behind the lodge, and was skirting the lawn at the back of the house, when he saw one of the French windows open and a girl come out with her dog. His heart gave a suffocating leap, and something seemed to rise in his throat and stay there, making him gulp idiotically. He had never before felt any emotion at the sight of her—just pleasure, a calm, slow-moving comfort. But to-day his head swam, and he could hardly see her as she came running and skipping across the lawn in a manner wholly at variance with her long skirts and coiled-up hair.

She turned aside before she reached the bushes that hid him, and he just managed to call after her—

"Tony!—Tony!"

The dog barked, and the next minute had scented him, and came cantering over the grass. Tony stood still and listened. She looked uncertain, and he called again—

"Tony!"

She turned quickly, and slipped behind the bushes, running to him along the path. When she was a few yards off she stopped dead.

"Mr. Furlonger . . ."

She stood outlined against a patch of wintry sky. It was the first time that he had seen her since her return. He thought that she was paler than in the valiant days of their friendship, and certainly the way she did her hair gave her a grown-up look. The stifling sensation in his throat became worse, and he could not speak.

"What is it . . . Mr. Furlonger?"

"I—I want to speak to you."

"Oh, no! I can't!" Her voice was quite childish.

"I must—please do."

She hesitated a moment.

"Then come into the shrubbery. We can be seen here from the house."

"I know. I'm not here to get you into trouble. I—I only came to say good-bye."

"Good-bye," she repeated vaguely, not quite understanding him, for her heart had said good-bye to him long ago.

"Yes—I'm going to London."

They were walking away from the house to where the pine-needles were thick under their feet —on a little, moist path smelling of winter. The sunshine came slanting down on Tony as she stopped, showing up her slim, strong figure in a cold purity of light. It rested on her hair, and he saw golden threads in it—in her eyes, and he saw golden sparks in them. For the first time he

realised how beautiful she was in all the assurance and unconsciousness of her youth. He longed to tell her so. Instead he muttered—

"How grown-up you look."

"Do I?—it's my hair, I suppose."

"Did they make you put it up?"

"Aunt Maggie said I was old enough—and I think so too."

"I hope you don't mind my coming here to see you." He was desperately embarrassed, and her manner did not reassure him. "I'm going away, you see, to study music, and I—I thought I should like to say good-bye."

"Oh, no," she said rather awkwardly, her excessive youth showing nowhere more clearly than in her inability to put him at his ease. "Oh, no, I'm glad you came—to say good-bye."

"I'm going to work very hard. There's a fellow—Eitel von Gleichroeder, I don't know if you've heard of him—who's taken a fancy to me, and says he'll coach me if I'll take up the violin professionally."

"I didn't know you played."

"Yes—but I'd no idea I was any good till I met this chap. He says I ought to make quite a decent thing out of it. I—I think it's worth trying."

"Oh, yes."

"You see," he continued, his voice shaking with emotion, "I want to start a new life—to be respectable, I suppose you'd call it. If I win fame as a violinist—and von Gleichroeder thinks I may—I—I shall have lived down everything."

"Yes . . . of course."

It was embarrassment, not lack of interest, that made her replies so trite. Memories of their friendship—now dim and far-off, separated from her by many wonderful happenings—were creeping up to her and filling her with a vague uneasiness.

As for Nigel, he realised now what had taken place. He understood why his tongue had suddenly become tied in her presence, and his eagerness collapsed into shuffling uncouthness. He had come to Shovelstrode to speak to a little girl —and he had found a woman. Tony the schoolgirl, the hoyden, the gay comrade, was now nothing but a little ghost haunting the slopes of Ashdown and the secret lanes of Kent. In her place stood a woman—come suddenly, as the woman always comes—and the woman, he knew, was trying to call back the girl, and see things from her eyes once more—and could not.

"Tony—Miss Strife—I wanted to tell you this, just to show you I'm not always going to be a convict on ticket-of-leave."

"I'm sure you won't. I hope you'll become very famous."

The words passed her lips in jerks. Her memories of him carried something very like repulsion. The more she struggled to revisualise the comradeship of two months ago, the greater was her distaste and humiliation. The kindest attitude possible for her now was one of embarrassed shyness. At first she had tried to heal herself with her memories, but as soon as she had

worked back to them she found their sweet secrets all sicklied with bitterness and shame.

He looked steadfastly at her, and he saw what had happened.

"Tony—you don't want to know me any longer—you want to forget we ever were friends. There's no good denying it, for I can see it."

She stood motionless, her lips white, her hands clenched in front of her.

"It's true—I can see it," he repeated.

She did not speak. Her memories were calling very loud, and there were tears in the voices, softening the shame.

"You can't bear the thought of having once been my friend."

Tears were rising in her throat, and with her tears the little school-girl who had run away came back, and showed her face again before she went for ever.

"Oh, it's hurt me!" she cried. "You don't know how it's hurt me!"

"To know I was a bad 'un?" He grasped the shaking hand she thrust out before her.

"Yes—I can't bear to think . . ."

"But I've changed—I swear I have. I'm going to live a decent life; and you're going to help me—by just saying you believe I can."

She shuddered, and pulled her hand away.

"I tell you I've changed," he exclaimed bitterly; "won't you believe me?"

She was crying now.

"You don't understand . . . you don't under-

stand . . . what one feels about men like you."

He winced.

"You don't know what I felt . . . when I heard . . ."

"Tony!" he cried, "you *must* forgive me."

"I do forgive you—it's not me you've hurt—but——"

"'But' you don't forgive me, and it is you I've hurt—that's what your 'but' means."

There was another silence, broken only by her muffled crying and the throbbing of the wind in the pine-tops. Nigel felt that his old life was struggling in its cerements to spring up and strangle the new life at its birth.

"I can't understand," sobbed the girl, "how you or any man could have done such a horrible thing. You've been merciless and cruel and grasping and unworthy—and you won my friendship by false pretences, by lies and shams—when all the time you knew that if I'd had any idea who you really were I wouldn't have let you come near me. Oh, it probably seems only a little thing to you, but it's dreadful for me to think I've given my friendship to a man who's been a—a cad.

His anger kindled, for her inexperience and ignorance no longer attracted him—they were now only fragments that remained of something he had worshipped.

"Then are you going to inquire into the history of every man you meet, in case any one else should 'win your friendship under false pretences'?

Most men have had a little shake up in their pasts."

"You don't call yours a little shake up, do you?"

The retort was obvious, and he flushed—but at the same time it gave him an unwonted courage.

"No, of course not. But you mustn't think it's been just as easy for me to keep straight as for you. Do you realise what being a man means?—it means to be tempted."

"Women are tempted."

He laughed.

"But not like men."

He saw the incredulousness of her eyes, and once more his rage flared up.

"You don't understand!" he cried, "you don't understand!"

Then it struck him that she would never understand, that she would go through life with her narrow ideas, acquired in a girls' school and nurtured in her home. All her divine womanly powers of sympathy and forgiveness would be strangled by her ignorance and her hard-and-fast rules based on inexperience. She was the only woman he knew of her class, but he knew the limitations of that class, and Tony would soon be bound by them like the others. Janey was so different—Janey realised what one felt like when one simply had to go on the bust, when one came beastly muckers. She scolded, but she understood. Tony did not scold, and she did not understand.

"I want you to understand," he said painfully.

"What?"

"About me—about other men."

"Why do you think I don't understand?"

"You don't!—you don't! You simply can't—and if you go on as you are, you never will. Oh, I wish you could! You're too good to be like—other women."

Something in his nervous, excited manner frightened her, and strange to say that faint thrill of fear removed the shame which had tarnished her attitude towards him that day. Once more she felt the subtle magic of his unusualness—the attraction of Mr. Smith.

"Tell me," she said in a low voice, "tell me about yourself."

He laughed a little.

"Oh, my story is just every man's. I've mucked it a bit worse, that's all. But the fight's pretty well as hard with all of us. Directly we're grown up, almost before, there are people going about whose paid business it is to tempt us. Tempting us, just when Nature has made it most difficult for us to resist, is the profession of thousands of human beings. We fall—we often fall—for if we didn't a powerful set would have empty pockets—so they see that we fall. And then we can't pick ourselves up, we sink deeper and deeper into the mud . . . and some of us touch bottom."

He paused, but she did not speak. Her face was turned away.

"The horrible thing I did," he continued almost

roughly, "which, if you'd only believe me, I loathe as much as you do—I did only as the consequence of other things, not quite so bad, before it. If a woman like you had come along when I first fell —I was only nineteen—she might have pulled me up again. But she didn't come. Other women came, and they knocked me flatter. They couldn't forgive. Poor devils! I don't blame them—they'd a great deal to forgive. I went down—and down—till it became a sort of habit to lie there in the ditch. Then you came, and I—I wanted to get up."

She still looked away from him, but her head was bowed.

"Oh, Tony—won't you give me a hand?"

"How can I?"

"By just believing I can and will do better, and by saying that if I live a decent life, and pull my name out of the dirt, and make myself fit to know you, I may be your—friend. You've a right to punish me, but I ask you to put aside that right for—for pity's sake."

"I don't see why you want my forgiveness so much—why it means such a lot to you."

"It means the world to me. Oh, Tony—little pal that was—forgive me! Life's a hard, rotten, wretched thing, and if there was no one to forgive. . . ."

"I'll try."

"Oh, please try! If you think, you'll come to understand things presently, even if you can't now. It's for your own sake as well as mine I ask it. Think how many a man who lies in the mud

wouldn't be there if only he had some woman to forgive him."

"I'll try——" she repeated falteringly.

"Then I've got what'll keep me going for the present. And, Tony, you'll believe that I can and will behave decently, and make myself worthy to be your—your friend?"

"Yes, I'll believe it."

"Thank you."

She was trembling from head to foot.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye."

He took her hand, and longed to kiss it. But he was still humble and afraid, and let it fall.

"Tony—Tony—you will have to forgive me a great many things . . . because I am so very hungry."

BOOK II

THE WORLD AGAINST THE THREE

CHAPTER I

GLIMPSES AND DREAMS

I

THERE was a foam of anemones in the hollows of Furnace Wood. The wind crept over the heads of the hazel bushes, bowing them gently, and shaking out of them the scent of their budding. From the young grass and tender, vivid mosses crept up more scents, faint, moist and earthy. The sky was grey behind the stooping hazels, but glimmered with the yellow promise of noon.

Janet Furlonger and Quentin Lowe had met to say good-bye in Furnace Wood. The scent of spring was in Janey's clothes, and when her lover drew her head down to his shoulder he tasted spring in her hair. But there was not spring on her lips when he sought them—only the salt wash of sorrow.

"Why do you cry, little Janey? This is the beginning of hope."

Another tear slid down towards her mouth, but she wiped it away—he must not drink her tears.

"Quentin . . . I hope it won't be for long."

"No, no—not long, little Janey, sweet, not long. It can't be. In six months, perhaps in less, you'll have a letter asking you to come up to town and marry a poor but independent journalist."

"You really think that this time you're going to succeed?"

"Of course. Do you imagine I'd touch Rider's idiotic rag with the tongs if I didn't look on it as a stepping-stone to better things. There's a mixed metaphor, Janey. Didn't you notice it?"

"No, dear."

"You're not critical enough, little one. You're worthy of good prose—when I'm too weak and heavy-hearted for poetry."

The wind sighed towards them, bringing the scent of hidden water.

"I must leave you, my own—or I shall be late. Now for months of hard work and hungry dreams of Janey, who will be given at last to my great hunger. Little heart, do you know what it is to hunger?"

She trembled. "Yes."

"Then pity me. Pity me from the fields when you walk in them, as you and I have so often walked, over fallen leaves—pity me from your fire when you sit by it and see in the embers things too beautiful to be—from your meals when you eat them—you and I have had only one meal together, Janey—and from your bed when you lie waking in it. Janey, Janey—pity me."

"Pity . . . yes. . . ."

He was holding her in his arms, looking into her beautiful, haggard face. A sudden pang contracted her limbs, then released them into an abandonment of weakness.

"Quentin . . . promise me that you will never forget how much you loved me."

"Janey!"

"Promise me."

"Janey, how dare you!—'loved you'! What do you mean?"

"Oh, please promise!"

She was crying. He had never seen her like this. Hitherto at their meetings she had left the stress and earthquake of love to him, fronting it with a sweet, half-timid calm. Now she clung to him, twisted and trembled.

"Promise, Quentin."

"Well, since you're such a silly little thing, I will. Listen. 'I promise never to forget how much I loved you.' There, you darling fool."

"Thank you . . ." she said weakly.

He drew her close, kissed her, and laughed at her.

"Janey—you're the spring, with its doubts and distresses. You were the autumn when autumn was here, all tanned and flushed and rumpled, with September in your eyes. Now you're the spring, thin, soft, aloof and wondering—you're sunshine behind a cloud—you're the promise of August and heavy apple-boughs."

"And you'll never forget how much you loved me. . . ."

II

The golden lights of late afternoon were kindled in London, warring with the smoky remnants of an April day. They shone on the wet pavements and mud-slopped streets—down Oxford Street poured the full blaze of the sunset, flamy, fogged, mysterious, crinkling into dull purples behind the Circus and the spire in Langham Place.

The Queen's Hall was emptying—crowds poured out, taxi-horns answered taxi-whistles, and the surge of the streets swept by, gathering up the units, and whirling them into the nothingness of many people. It gathered up Nigel Furlonger, and rushed him, like a bubble on a torrent, down Regent Street, with his face to the darkness of the south—lit from below by the first flash of the electric advertisements in Piccadilly Circus, from above by the first pale, useless glimmer of a star.

He walked quickly, his chin lifted, but mechanically taking his part in the general hustle, not too much in dreamland to make way, shift, pause, or plunge, as the ballet of the pavements might require. His hands were clenched in his pockets. He, perhaps alone among those hundreds, saw the timid star.

A dream was threading through his heart, knitting up the tags of longing, regret and hope that fluttered there. A definite scheme seemed now to explain the sorrow of the world. The armies of the sorrowful had received marching orders, had marched to music, had been given a nation, and a song. Nigel had heard the Eroica Symphony.

In his ears was still the bourdon of drums, the sigh of strings, the lilt of wood-wind, the restless drone of brasses. He had heard sorrow claim its charter of rights, vindicate its pleadings, fight, triumph and crown itself. He had seen the life-story of the sorrowful man, presented not as a tragedy or a humiliation, a shame to be veiled, but

as a pageant, a tremendous spectacle, set to music, lighted, staged, applauded.

At first the sorrowful man was half afraid, he sought refuge and disguise in laughter, he pined for distraction and a long sleep. But each time he touched his desire, the wailings of heavenly wood-wind called him onward to holier, darker things. He had dropped the dear, dustless prize, and gone boldly on into the fire and blackness. . . . A thick, dark cloud swagged on the precipices of frozen mountains, frowned over deserts of snow. The sorrowful man stumbled in the dark, and his loud crying and the flurry of his seeking rose in a wail against the thudding drums of fate. Gold crept into the cloud, curling out from under it like a flame, and the sorrowful man seemed to see a human face looking down on him, and a hand that held seven stars. . . . "Who made the Seven Stars and Orion. . . ." It was by the light of those stars in the Hero's hand that the sorrowful man saw, in a sudden awful wonder, that he was not alone—he marched in the ranks of a huge army. All round him, over the frozen plain, under the cloud with its lightnings, towards the blackness of the boundless void, marched the army of the sorrowful, unafraid. They marched in mail, helmeted, plated, with drawn swords. The ground shook with the thunder of their tread, the mountains quaked, the darkness smoked, the heavens heeled over, toppled and scattered before the conquering host whom the Lord had stricken—triumphant, fearless, proud, crowned and pierced. . . .

Footsteps overtook Nigel, and he heard the greeting of a fellow student.

"You're in the clouds, old man. Who sent you there? Beethoven?"

Nigel stared.

"But the only cosmic genius is Offenbach."

"You mean the 'Orphée'?"

"Yes—and 'Hoffmann.' Life isn't a triumphal march, for all Beethoven would make it—it's comic opera, with just a pinch of the bizarre and a spice of the macabre. That's Offenbach."

Furlonger was still marching with the stricken army.

"When a man suffers," continued the student, "the gods laugh, the world laughs, and last of all —if he's a sport—the man laughs too."

"Sorrow is a triumph," said Nigel, dreamily.

"Not at all, old man—sorrow is a commonplace. The question is, what are we to make of the commonplace—a pageant or a joke? I'm not sure that Offenbach hasn't given a better answer than Beethoven."

III

In a small room in Gower Street a man lay on his bed, his face crammed into the pillow, his shoulders high against his ears, his legs twisted in a rigid lock of endurance. Now and then a shudder went through him, but it was the shudder of something taut and stiff, over which the merest surface tremble can pass.

In his hand he crushed a letter. Behind his teeth words were forming, and fighting through to

his colourless lips. "Janey!—my Janey! Oh, my God! I can't bear this."

He suddenly twisted himself round on to his back, and faced the aching, yellow square of the window, where a May day was mocked by rain. There was a pipe close to the window, and the water poured from it in a quick tinkling trickle, cheering in rhythm, tragic in tone. Quentin unfolded Janey's letter.

He read it—but that word is inadequate, for he read it in the same spirit as an Egyptian priest might read the glyphs of his divinity, seeing in each sign a volume of esoteric meaning, so that every jot and tittle was worthy of long minutes' contemplation.

It was some time since Janey's letters had ceased to be for Quentin what she hoped. Literally they were rather bald and laboured, for Janey was no penwoman, but she put a wealth of thought and passion into the straggling lines, and for a long while he had seen this. But now he saw much more, she would have trembled to think of the meaning he read into her words—he tested each phrase for the insincerity he felt sure it must conceal, he hunted up and down the pages for that monster unknown to Janet, the *arrière pensée*. Her letters were a torture to him—they tortured his brain with shadows and seekings, they tortured his heart with blue fires of misgiving and scorchings of jealousy. She did not write oftener than once a week, but the torment of a single letter lasted till its successor at once varied and renewed it.

Lying there in the hideous dusk of what should

have been a summer afternoon, Quentin wondered if the doom of love and lovers had not been spoken him—"thou canst not see My Face and live."

It was a vital fear. Before he had brought his love to its consummation, snatched the veil from its mysteries, and looked it in the face, it had, in spite of hours of anguish, been his comfort, the strongest, tenderest, purest thing in his life. But now he saw, without much searching, that this love, though deeper and fiercer than ever, belonged somehow to his lower self. To realise it brought despair instead of comfort, wreckage instead of calm. He dared not, as in former days, plunge his sick heart into it as into a spring of healing waters—rather it was a scalding fountain, bubbling and seething out of death.

He had hoped that perhaps separation would make him calmer. Of late he had often denied himself the sight of Janey in that same vain hope. But now, as then, he found her letters almost as disintegrating as her presence—indeed more so, since they gave wider scope to his familiar demon of doubt. He wondered if he would ever find rest. Would marriage give it to him? He started up suddenly on the bed. An awful thought was thrust like a sword against his heart—the thought that even in marriage he would not find peace.

He had fallen into the habit of looking on marriage as the end of sorrows—and now, when fate and hard work seemed to have brought it within gazing-distance of hope, he suddenly saw that it would be as full of torment as his present state; or rather, more so—just as his present state was

over a mixed assembly of more-or-less celebrities with that debonair self-confidence which had helped make him a famous novelist in spite of his novels. There were one or two great ones present, just to raise the level—he did not introduce them to Lowe. He knew exactly whom they would like to meet, and Lowe, he felt, would let the conversation down, just when it was becoming yeasty with literary wit. There were other people in the room who showed a tendency to do this, and Hallidie had carefully introduced them to one another, so that they could all fail mutually in a well-upholstered corner.

"Ah—Lowe. Glad to see you. Come, let me introduce you to Miss Strife"—and sweeping Quentin past the renowned author of *Life and How to Bear It,* and Dompter, the little, insignificant, world-famous sea-poet, he presented him to a very young girl, sitting alone on a divan.

Quentin's first feeling was one of outrage. What right had Hallidie to drag him away from the pulse of things, so vital to his struggling ambition, and condemn him to atrophy with a flapper. He stared down at her disapprovingly —then something in her wistful look disarmed him.

"I believe our fathers are neighbours in the country," he said stiffly.

He did not notice her reply. It was not that which made him stop his furious glances at Hallidie and sit down beside her. She was evidently very young. There was a lack of sophis-

tication about her hair-dressing which proclaimed an early attempt, her frock was simple and girlish, her face alert and innocent.

Quentin found himself gulping in his throat, almost as if tears had found their way there at last; for he suddenly realised how new and beautiful it was to sit beside a woman and not be tormented. As he looked at her delicate profile, the pure curves of her chin and collarless neck, his heart became suddenly still. There was a great calm. Peace had come down on him like water. Simplicity rested on his parched thoughts like rain-clouds on a desert. He seemed suddenly to come back to life, to the world, and to see them in the calm, usual light of every day. The racket, the glare, the sense of being in an abnormal relation to his surroundings—all were gone. For the first time in his complicated, sophisticated, catastrophic life, Quentin Lowe was at peace.

IV

It was late in June. A haze wimpled the pine-trees of Shovelstrode, and the heather between their trunks was in full flower. The old house shimmered in the haze and sunshine, and stared away to yellow fields of buttercups and distances of brown and blue.

Tony and Awdrey Strife were lying in the shadow of a chestnut on the lawn. Two young gracious figures in muslins, they lay with their chins on their hands, and looked away towards the golden weald. They did not speak much, for the

post had just come, and they were reading their letters. Awdrey giggled to herself a good deal over hers, but Tony was serious—the corners of her mouth even drooped a little, but whether from sorrow or tenderness or both it would be hard to say. Suddenly she made an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Awdrey.

"It's a letter from Furlonger."

"*The* Furlonger!"

"Yes—he's written me quite a long letter."

"What cheek. I thought you'd seen the last of him."

"He came to say good-bye before he went to London."

"Oh——"

Awdrey rolled over on her side, and stared hard at her sister.

"Did he know you were in town last month?"

"No—I've never written to him, and this is the first time he's written to me."

"Then he hasn't shown unseemly eagerness—it's nearly six months since he left. What does he say?—anything exciting?"

"Exciting for him. Von Gleichroeder is giving a pupils' concert at the Bechstein, and Mr. Furlonger is going to play."

"A solo?"

"Yes—something by Scriabin. He's only had six months' teaching, but von Gleichroeder's so pleased with him that he's going to let him play at this concert of his. Then he'll finish his course, and then he'll start professionally."

"Good Lord!—it sounds thrilling for an ex-convict. Let's see his letter."

"Here it is. No," changing suddenly, "I think I'd rather read it to you."

"Right-O! Excuse a smile."

"Don't be an idiot, Awdrey. Now listen; he says: 'Von Gleichroeder's concert is fixed for the twenty-seventh'—why, that's next Friday—'and it's been settled that I'm to play Scriabin's second Prelude. It sounds like cats fighting, but it's exciting stuff. Von Gleichroeder is tremendously keen on the ultra-moderns—nothing makes him madder than to hear Verdi or Gounod or Rossini. So I play d'Indy and Stravinsky and Strauss and Sibelius; except when I'm alone in my digs—and then I have the old tunes out, for I like them best.'"

She did not read the next paragraph aloud.

"I've been having a hard fight for it, Tony—but I'm pulling through. Music has helped me, and the memory of our friendship, and the thought that you're trying to understand me and forgive me."

"Well, I wish him luck," said Awdrey; "what a good thing von Gleichroeder found him out!"

"Yes, he'll have his chance now—his chance of a decent life."

"Nonsense, Tony! That's not what he's after—fame and dibs, my dear girl, fame and dibs."

"He told me he was accepting von Gleichroeder's offer because he wanted to be—good."

"Well, London's a queer place to go for that."

"He's gone there to work. He had no chance here."

"More chance than he'll have there—you bet he's painted the place pretty red by this time."

Her sister was about to retort sharply, when a man suddenly came round the corner of the house towards them.

"Awdrey!" cried Tony, springing up. "Here's Quentin!"

CHAPTER II

THE LETTER THAT DID NOT COME

THE door was wide open at Sparrow Hall, and a square of sunshine lay on the kitchen floor. In the little flower-stuffed garden bees were humming lazily, and a thrush was singing in the last of the laburnum. Tangles of roses trailed over the farm-house walls, they hung round the window-frames, darkening the rooms, and over the door, sending faint perfumes to Janey as she sat in the kitchen.

She looked pale and washed-out with the heat. The outlines of her splendid figure were drooping, and there was an ominous hollowing of the curves of her face and arms. She sat at the table, her cheek resting on her palm, reading from a pile of letters. They were long letters, closely written in a sharp, scrawling hand, on thin paper that crackled gently as she fingered it. Every now and then she looked up anxiously, and seemed to listen. Then her head would bow again, and the paper would crackle softly as before.

At last the garden gate clicked, and she saw the postman's cap coming up the path between the rows of sweet peas. She sprang to her feet, trembling and fighting for her self-command. She reached the door just as he lifted his hand to knock.

"A letter for you, miss," and old Winkworth smiled genially.

The colour rushed over Janey's cheeks like a wave, then as a wave ebbed out again. She

took the letter with a hand that shook piteously, her lips parted and a low laugh broke from them. Then suddenly her expression changed—in such a manner that Winkworth muttered anxiously—

"Fine afternoon, ain't it, miss?"

"Yes—a glorious afternoon. Good-day, Winkworth."

"Good-day, miss," and he shambled off.

Janey turned into the house, and dropping into her chair by the table, began to sob childishly. It was more from exhaustion than grief—the exhaustion of hopes strained to breaking-point, and then allowed to relax again into disappointment and frustration. She was so dreadfully tired—she so longed to sleep, quietly, deeply, at once. She laid her head on the table, and her shoulders heaved, straining and struggling as if the burden of her sorrow were physical.

Then suddenly she noticed the unopened letter, and her sobs broke out with even greater vehemence. Nigel! poor Nigel! She had not opened his letter—she had flung it aside and forgotten it, because it was not Quentin's. It was the day of his concert, too—what a beast she felt!

She tore open the envelope, and wiped away the tears that blinded her.

"My own dear Janey,

"This is just to keep myself from thinking of that damned concert. It's scaring me a bit—more than a bit, in fact. Who would have thought that any one with my past could suffer from stage

fright?—but that little thing of Scriabin's is the very devil. Old von G. has been ragging me no end over it—we nearly came to blows last practice. I hope you and the lad don't mind my not wanting you to come up for the show; I feel it would be the last straw for you two to see me make a fool of myself—not that I mean to, but you never know what may happen. Cheer up—you shall come and help me when I fill the Albert Hall.

"By the way, I saw that little bounder Quentin Lowe at a concert at the Queen's last Sunday.

"Now, good-bye; I'm turning into bed. This time to-morrow it'll all be over, and I'll send you a telegram. Greetings to the lad.

"Ever yours, dear,

"NIGEL."

Janey folded the letter with trembling hands. It filled her with a kind of pitiful anguish, for she knew that the only thing in it that interested her was the reference to Quentin. Nigel's wonderful concert, about which she and Len had dreamed so many dreams, had faded into the background of her thoughts, driven out by her sleepless, bruising anxiety for her lover.

It was over a fortnight since he had written. She had before her his last letter, in which he said: "I will write again in a day or two, and tell you the exact date of my return." She had waited, but the letter had not come. She had written, but had had no answer. What could have happened?

There had been nothing in the past few weeks to make her expect this silence. His last bid for independence had met with more success than the others. He had fought hard against failure and discouragement, and had now found work on one or two good dailies. Their marriage was at last in sight. He was expected home for a couple of weeks' holiday, then he would work on through the autumn, and there was no reason why, if things prospered, they should not be married soon after Christmas.

Yes—at last their marriage was a thing to be reckoned with, talked about, and planned for. For the first time Janey could consider such things as home and outfit, breaking the news to her brothers, and leaving Sparrow Hall—all were now within the range of probability and expectation. But a terrible gloom had settled on these last days. It was not merely her sorrow at leaving the farm and the boys—it was something less accountable and more tempestuous than that. It had its source in Quentin's letters. She could see that he was not happy—their marriage, their longed-for, prayed-for, wept-for, worked-for marriage, was not bringing him happiness. On the contrary, his suffering seemed to have increased. His doubts and forebodings had been transferred from material circumstances to more subtle terrors of soul—he doubted the future more passionately, because more spiritually, than ever.

Janey had not been able to understand this at first, but in time his attitude had communicated itself to her, though whether her distrust was in-

dependent or merely a reflection of his, it would be hard to say. Anyhow, she doubted—fiercely, miserably, despondingly. She had started, on his recommendation, to make herself some clothes, but the work lagged and depressed her. She found herself hungering for the early times of their courtship, when their marriage was a dream made golden by distance. She thought of the days when his name had rung like bells in her heart, without a horrid dissonance of fear, when his letters were pure joy, and the thought of meeting him pure anticipation. Would those days return?—And now, here was his silence, consuming her. Why didn't he write? He had been so eager in his last letter, though, as usual, eagerness had soon been throttled by despair.

"I shall have you—I shall have you at last, my beautiful, tall Janey, for whom I hunger. But I am filled with doubts. There are some men in whose mouths manna turns to dust and the water of life to gall. Everything I touch is doomed. Either my soul or my body betrays me—my soul is so hot and my body so weak—so damnably weak. If only my hot soul had been given a stout body, or my weak body a weak soul . . . then I should have been happy. But now it is the eternal fight between fire and water."

Janey pushed the letter aside, and picked up another. She had been trying to comfort herself with Quentin's letters, but they were not on the whole of a comforting nature. His restless misery was in them all. If his last letter had been happy,

she would not have worried nearly so much. She would have put down his silence to some trite external cause—pressure of work or indefiniteness of plans—he had always been an erratic correspondent. But his unhappiness opened a dozen roads to her morbid imaginings. It was dreadful to think that all she had given to Quentin had only made him more unhappy.

Perhaps he was too miserable to write—not likely, since he was one of those men whom despair makes voluble, but nevertheless a real terror to her unreason. Perhaps he had not received her last letter, and thought that she had played him false—he had always been jealous and inclined to suspicion. This last idea obtained a hold on her that would have been impossible had not her mind been weakened by anxiety. She had heard of letters going astray in the post, and probably Quentin had been expecting one from her, and not receiving it had been too proud to write himself. Or perhaps he had received it, but had thought it cold. He had often taken her to task for some fancied coldness which she had never meant.

In her desperation she resolved to write again. Hastily cramming his letters into the boot-box where she unromantically kept them, she seized paper and ink, and began to scrawl despairingly—

"My Darling, Darling Boy,

"Why don't you write? Didn't you get my last letter? I posted it on the 16th. Quentin, I

can't stand this suspense. Are you unhappy? Oh, my boy, my boy, my heart aches for you. I know you suffer—and I can't bear it——"

The pen fell from her shaking hand as footsteps sounded in the garden. The next minute Leonard came in—luckily for Janet he was not very observant.

"Well, Janey—I've sent off the wire."

"What wire?" she asked dully.

"To the old bounder, of course—to buck him up for to-night. I said 'Cheer up. You'll soon be dead.' That ought to encourage him."

Janey smiled wanly.

"Meantime I've got a piece of news for you. It'll make you laugh. But let's have a drink first —I'm dreadfully thirsty. This weather dries one up like blazes."

"There's beer in the cupboard."

"Right-O! Now we'll drink to Nigel's very good health. Have some, old girl. No? But I say, you look as if you needed it. You're as white as chalk."

"It's only the heat. What's your news, Len?"

"Nothing much, really—only that little misshapen monkey Quentin Lowe's engaged to be married."

"Quentin Lowe. . . ."

Janey's voice seemed to her to come from very far away, as if some one in another part of the room were speaking. She grew sick and faint, but at the same time knew it was all ridiculous.

"Yes—I don't wonder you're surprised. Guess whom to."

"Are you sure—quite sure?"

"Yes, of course. I had it from his father. Guess whom to."

"I can't. . . . I—I can't believe it."

"Yes, it's no end of a joke, isn't it? You'd never think a woman would be fool enough to have him, when you can get the genuine article from any organ-grinder. But stop laughing, Janey, and guess who it is."

"I—I can't. . . . Did you really hear it from his father? . . . It can't be true. Quentin's in London."

"He's been there for the last three months, but he came home on Wednesday."

"Wednesday——"

"Yes—why not? But you haven't guessed who the girl is yet."

"I can't guess . . . tell me, Len."

"Well, it's Strife's youngest daughter, the one that's just come out."

Janet made a grab at Leonard's half-emptied glass and drained it.

"That's it—drink her health. She'll need it."

"Len—did—did you really hear it from old Lowe?"

"Well, I heard it first of all in the Wheatsheaf. I've been as thirsty as hell all the afternoon, so on my way back from the post-office I turned in at the old pub for a pint. Dunk told me, Dunk of Golden Compasses. Then no sooner had I got outside than I saw the old devil-dodger prancing

along, and I couldn't resist howling to him—'Hear your son's engaged—wish him victory in the strife.' He looked poisonous, so I just said, 'You'll be letting strife into your household.' To which he deigned reply, 'I am—ah—um—completely—ah—satisfied with my—ah—son's—um—matrimonial choice."

Janey managed to reach the window.

"He met her a lot in town, I believe. Of course, he'd known her father down here, but had never met the girl herself. I believe it all happened pretty quick. Dunk says so. I don't see how he knows, but every one always seems to know everything about engaged couples."

"Is that all?"

"What more do you want?—I'm off now to Cherrygarden Farm—I promised Wilsher I'd be round to look at those chicks of his."

"Don't be long. . . ."

"What time's supper?"

"Any time you like."

"Well, make it half-past eight. It's a good peg over to Cherrygarden, and if I come back by Dormans I can send another wire to Nigel."

"Oh, don't, Len!"

"Why ever not?"

"I don't see that it's so . . . so very important that he should know."

"About what?"

"The—the engagement."

"You silly old girl! I wasn't going to wire him about that—waste of a good sixpence that would be! But don't you realise that at eight to-

night *the* concert begins? I telegraphed to him an hour ago, just to buck him up beforehand—next time I want to catch him in full squeak."

"Very well—but, Len . . . don't be late."

She was still standing by the window, but something in her words made him go across to her.

"You're feeling seedy, Janey?"

"Just a bit washed-out."

"It's the heat, I expect. It's made me feel a little queer too."

"Then ought you to go to Cherrygarden?"

"I must—and it's getting cooler now. Take care of yourself, old sister, and don't sit too much in this hot kitchen."

He squeezed her hand, and went out. She watched him go, blessing his obtuseness, even though it was leaving her to fight through her awful hour alone. He went down the path, and out at the gate—then she staggered back into the room, and fell in a heap against the table.

She had not fainted, though she longed to faint—to win the respite of forgetfulness at whatever cost, if only for a minute. She lay an inert, huddled mass against the table-leg, motionless except for a long shudder now and then. All power had left her limbs—they indeed might be in a swoon—but her brain throbbed with a dazzling consciousness; it seemed as if it had drawn into itself all the consciousness of her body, leaving senses dull, nerves dumb, and muscles slack, in order to prime itself with the whole range of feeling.

Strange to say, pain was not the paramount emotion, and despair was scarcely present. Rather, she was consumed by a passionate sense of doubt —of Quentin, of herself, of the whole world. It was like the sudden removal of a prop which one had thought could not be shaken—it was like a sudden precipitation into a world where the ordinary cosmic laws did not hold—she seemed almost to doubt her own identity in that first gasp of revelation.

It could not be true. Quentin could not have failed her like this. Leonard must be mistaken. If one were to see the sun setting in the east or the sea on fire one would doubt one's senses, one would not doubt the universal laws. Neither would she doubt Quentin—she rather would doubt Leonard's senses, doubt her own.

She had not in the whole course of her love doubted Quentin. It was he who had doubted her, who had tormented her with his distrusts and jealousies. "I'm only a misshapen little bounder, Janey—the first decent man who comes along will snatch you from me. But he will never love you as I do—Janey, Janey, little Janey" . . . the words seemed to come from outside her, from the shadowy corners of the room. She sat up and listened. They came again—"Janey, my own little love, my little heart—our love wounds, but it is the wound of immortality, the wound which must always be when the Infinitely Great lifts up and gathers to itself the infinitely little." . . . "Stand by me, stand by me—I have nothing but my sword. I threw away my shield long ago. If you do not

stand by me I shall fall." . . . "Janey, love, dear little love, with eyes like September." . . .

She crouched back in terror. Was she going mad? No, these were only words from Quentin's letters—the letters she had just read—ringing in her strung and distracted brain.

"Love, my little sweet love, do you think of me sometimes in the long evenings when I think of you?—sometimes when I am thinking of you, I tremble lest you should not be thinking of me." . . . "Do you know how often I dream of you, Janey? You come to me so often in sleep—once you stood between me and the window, and I saw the stars through your hair. Oh, God!—when I dream I hold you in my arms, and wake with them empty." . . .

She could stand it no longer. She sprang to her feet—the strength of desperation had come at last. There was one only who could tell her which she was to doubt—her own senses or, as it seemed to her, the cosmic laws of his love.

She would go over to Redpale Farm—she would see Quentin, she would have an explanation. There would be one—and she would take her stand boldly beside him, against his father, against the whole world—though she, like him, had thrown away her shield long ago.

CHAPTER III

ONLY A BOY

It was about four o'clock, and in spite of what Leonard said, not much cooler than at noon. The sun scorched on the hay-grass, drawing out of it a drowsy perfume, which a faint, hot breeze scattered into the hedges. The trees scarcely moved, and their shadows were rusted with the curling sorrel. Clumps of dog-roses and elder flowers splashed the bushes with sudden pinks and whites, while vetches trailed their purples less startlingly in the hedgerows.

Janey walked fast, and every now and then she ran for little sprints. Her breath sobbed in her throat, her eyes were fixed and her hands clenched. She climbed recklessly over gates, and plunged through copses; her hair was soon almost on her shoulders, flying from her face in wisps, straggling round her ears; her face became flushed and moist with the heat—she tore her sleeve, and scraps of bramble hung on her skirt. What woman but Janey would have rushed to confront a faithless lover in such a state? But even now, when almost any one would have realised how much depended on her appearance, she was careless and oblivious. She did not feel in the least dismayed at the start given by the servant who admitted her, nor, later, by her own reflection in a mirror in the study.

It was the same little book-lined room in which

she had had tea with Quentin on her first visit to Redpale. There was the glorious Eastern rug which he had said "had her tintings—her browns and whites and reds." There was the big pewter jar that had then held chrysanthemums, but held roses now. They were delicate white roses, faintly, sweetly scented. Janey went over to them and laid her hot face against them. She could hardly tell why, but they seemed to bring into the room an alien atmosphere. Quentin had never given her white roses—as a matter of fact he had given her scarcely any garden flowers, except chrysanthemums—he had once said that only wild flowers were for wild things. She thought of bunches of buttercups, of broom with bursting pods, of hazel sprays and tawny grasses. Now she suddenly wished that he would give her a white rose. She took one out of the jar, and was trying to fasten it in her breast when footsteps sounded outside the room.

She turned deadly pale, and dropped the rose. For the first time she felt that she had been foolish to come. Quentin might be angry with her, for her coming would rouse his father's suspicions. Her hurry and desperation might prejudice him against her. In an unaccustomed qualm she realised that she was flushed, dishevelled and perspiring. She felt at a disadvantage, and drew back as the door opened, seeking the shadows by the hearth.

"Janey!"

He stood in the doorway, his hand on the latch, his chin thrust forward, his pale face bright in the

gleaming afternoon. His youth struck her with a sudden appeal—his youth and delicacy, both emphasised in the soft yellow light—and a sob tore up through her breast.

"Oh . . ." she said, and moved towards him.

He shut the door.

"Oh, I'm sorry I came!" she cried.

He did not speak, but came forward, stopping abruptly a few feet away.

"Janey—I want to explain. . . ."

"Explain . . ." She had not thought there would be any explanation needed—or, if needed, possible.

"Yes—I ought to have written, but I couldn't, somehow—or rather, I wrote you a dozen letters, and tore them all up."

She wondered why she felt so calm.

"I—I asked my father to call and see you."

"You mean to say—he knows?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my God!"

Her calmness staggered, and all but collapsed. For the first time her doubts gave way to even bitterer realisation. This confession to Quentin's father, this betrayal of the secret she had spent her health and happiness for four years to keep, made her grasp what an hour ago had seemed beyond the reach even of credulity.

"Quentin—why did you tell him?—how could you!—after all we've suffered. . . ."

"I—I—I was desperate, Janey, I had to tell some one, and he was so sympathetic—much more than I'd expected."

"When did you tell him?"

"The night I came back from town."

"After the—the rest was settled?"

He nodded.

"Quentin, have you told *her?*" She was accepting the impossible quite meekly now.

"No, no!—I can't tell *her.*"

She waited a moment for what she thought the inevitable entreaty not to betray him. Thank God!—it did not come.

"She would never forgive you," she said slowly. "Young girls don't."

"And you, Janey . . ."

She drew back from him.

"You can't ask me that now."

"Why?"

"Well—well, can't you see I hardly realise things as yet. An hour ago I preferred to doubt my own senses rather than doubt you. Now——"

"You doubt me."

"No, I don't doubt you. I'm convinced—that you're a cad."

Her voice, clear at the beginning of the sentence, had sunk almost to a whisper. He shrank back, wincing before her gentleness.

She herself wondered how long it would last, this unnatural calm. It came to her quite easily, she did not have to fight for it, and yet the general sensation was of being under an anæsthetic. She only half realised her surroundings, this horrible new earth on which she was wandering homeless; her emotions seemed dull and inadequate to the situation—it would be a relief if she could feel more.

Then suddenly feeling came—it came in a tide, a tempest, a whirlwind. It shook her like an earthquake and blasted her like a furnace. She staggered sideways, as a great gloom darkled on her eyes. Then the shadows parted, and she saw Quentin's face, half turned away—pale, fragile, sullen, the face of a boy—of a boy in despair.

"Quentin!" she cried. "Oh, my boy—my little boy! You aren't going to behave like a cad."

"But I am a cad, my dear Janey."

He spoke brutally, in the stress of feeling.

"Oh, Quentin!—Quentin!"

She was losing not only her calm, but her dignity—yet she did not heed it. She sprang towards him, seized his hands, and gasped her words close to his ear, as unconsciously he turned his head from her.

"Quentin, you can't forsake me—not now—not after all I've given you—you can't, you can't! You loved me so much—you love me still. You can't have stopped loving me all of a sudden like this. And if you love me, you can't forsake me. Quentin, I shall die if you forsake me."

"Janey—let me explain. I can't explain if you're so frenzied. Oh, Janey, don't faint."

She fell back from him suddenly, and he caught her in his arms.

The soft weight of her, her warmth, the familiar scent of her hair and her tumbled gown, snatched him back into departing days. He suddenly lost his self-command, or rather his sense of the present. He clasped her to him, and kissed her and kissed her—as eagerly, passionately and tenderly as

ever in Furnace Wood. She did not resist or shrink, her eyes were closed, and she lay back a dead weight in his arms, drinking her last despairing draught of happiness. . . . His clasp grew tighter—oh, that he would crush the life out of her as she lay there under his lips! . . .

Then suddenly he dropped his arms, and they staggered back from each other, piteously conscious once more of the present and its doom.

"Janey, Janey . . . I can't—I mustn't love you."

"But you do love me——"

She sank into a chair, and covered her face.

"Yes—I love you. But it's in byways of love. Can't you understand?"

She shook her head.

"Don't you see that, all through, my love for you has been unworthy—the worst in me? . . ."

She tried to speak, but her words were unintelligible.

"You and I have never been happy together——"

"Never? . . ."

"Yes—at times. But it was a blasting, scorching happiness—there was no peace in it. We doubted each other."

"I never doubted you."

"Yes, you did. When I said good-bye to you before going to London, you made me promise never to forget how much I'd loved you."

"But it wasn't you I doubted then. I doubted fate, chance, God, anything you like—but not you."

She had recovered her self-control, and her voice was hard and even.

"Oh, don't, Janey!"

"Why not?—why should I spare you? You haven't spared me."

"You mustn't think I intended you to—to hear things in this way. I'd meant to give you an explanation first. But the news leaked out——"

"Well, you can give me an explanation now."

"I'll try—but it will be very difficult," he said falteringly. "You're like a flood to me—I feel giddy and helpless when I'm with you. I don't think I'll ever be able to make you understand. I wish you hadn't come like this—I wish——"

"Please go on, Quentin."

Her manner disconcerted him. He could not understand her alternations between hysteria and stolid calm.

"You mustn't think I don't realise I've behaved like a skunk. But I don't want to dwell on it—it would only be putting mud on my face to make you pity me—but I do ask you to try to understand me. . . . Janey, I've done this for your good as well as mine. You shared the misery and ruin of my love. In saving myself, I've saved you too. Janey, Janey—don't you see that our love was nothing but a rotten sickness of the soul?"

He looked at her anxiously, but her face was expressionless as wood.

"You and I have always been more or less wretched together, and though at first I felt our unhappiness was doing us good—strengthening us and purifying us—of late I felt it was doing us harm, it was disorganising and unmanning us. . . ."

He paused—even an outburst of fury or denial would have been welcome.

"To begin with," he continued in an uncertain voice, "I thought it was the hopelessness of it all that was making it so dreadful, but when our marriage was actually in sight—of hope, at least—I felt matters were only getting worse. My thoughts were like sand and fire—my love was like the salt water I compared it to long ago, with madness in each draught. I felt our marriage would be a bigger hell than anything that had gone before it—and yet, I wanted you! Oh, God! I wanted you!"

She bowed forward suddenly, over her clenched hands.

"Janey, Janey—I don't want to hurt you more than I must. It's not your fault that every thought of you was fire and poison to me. You were just a weapon in fate's hands to wound me—we were both in fate's hands, to wound each other."

Paradoxically it was at that moment the old impulse returned. He came forward, holding out his arms to her. But this time she shrank back, cowering into the chair. Her movement brought him to his senses.

"You see how I can hardly speak to you. I must get on, and get done. I want to tell you how I met *her* . . . Tony."

Janey shuddered. She had now come to the most awful pain of all.

"Tony . . ." repeated Quentin. She noticed how he dwelt on the word, as if he were drawing strength from it, and at the same time she saw a

slight change in his manner. He lifted his head and spoke more steadily.

"I met her at a literary function, and I sat beside her all the evening. I remember every minute—I didn't speak much, nor did she, but a wonderful simplicity and calm seemed to radiate from her, a beautiful innocence—— What is it, Janey?"

"Nothing—go on."

"She was so young, scarcely more than a child—young and sweet. When I got home that night I felt for the first time an infinite peace in my soul—I felt all quiet and simple. I didn't worry or brood any more. I wasn't in love with her then—oh, no!—but I wanted to meet her again, just for the quiet of it. I did meet her shortly afterwards, and it was as beautiful as before. Then suddenly it all rushed over me—I wanted her, for my own; because she was pure and childlike and simple and inexperienced."

The confidence of his voice had grown, and in his eyes was something Janey had never seen there before. She now realised a little what Tony meant to him—what she, Janey, had never meant. She knew now that she could never win him back, and more, that she did not particularly want to. Tony stood to Quentin for all that was lovely and heroic in womanhood, whereas she, his Janey, had never been more to him than the incarnation of his own desperate passions. She stepped back, and the action was symbolical—she stepped out of his way. Her pleadings would no longer harass and shake him, she would leave him to his salva-

tion, since he loved it better than the woman who had meekly renounced hers for his sake.

"I grew desperate for her," continued Quentin, in the new assured voice. "Oh, don't think I gave you up without a struggle!—I had a dreadful time. I suffered horribly. But what will not a man do for his soul? I felt that my soul was at stake. It's damned rot to talk of men turning away from salvation—no man can get a real chance of salvation and not grasp it at once. Oh, don't think it didn't cut me to the heart to treat you as I did! I felt a swine and a cad, but I saw that I was grasping my only chance of redemption—and yours too. I couldn't help it, I tell you—no man can. Oh, don't think that if I could have saved myself with you, I wouldn't have done it rather than. . . . Oh, my God!—but I couldn't."

There are moments in a woman's life when she is simply staggered by the selfishness of the male, and yet to every woman there is something inevitable about it, so that it does not stir up her rage and contempt, as it would if she saw it in her own sex. Janey felt no anger with Quentin, she only thought how pitifully young he looked.

There was a pause—a long pause, broken by the rustling of the wind in the garden. Janey's eyes were fixed on Quentin's face, her whole being seemed concentrated upon it, all her thoughts, all her passion, all her pity. Poor child! poor, poor boy!

"Tony is very young," she said suddenly.

"Yes, only seventeen."

"And she's very good and gentle and well-bred."

He nodded.

"And she's never done anything really wrong."

"No."

There was another silence. This time it was Quentin who stared at Janey. He was still strong in the assurance Tony gave him; he was glad that they had begun to discuss her—he had not that feeling of being left alone with Janey, which at first had threatened to make the interview so terrible. At one time it had seemed almost as if the past had risen to swamp him—but now Tony had come to hold back the floods. The thought of her changed everything somehow, altered the old values, weakened what before had been invincible. Janey's face stood out from the shadows, washed in the indiscreet light of the afternoon, and for the first time he noticed a certain age and weariness about it. She was twenty-eight, nearly four years older than he, but he had never thought of her in relation to years and time. She had been to him an eternity of youth, her age was as irrelevant as the age of a play of Shakespeare or a symphony of Beethoven. But now he realised that she was twenty-eight—and looked it. There were hollows under her cheek-bones, where full, firm flesh should have been; there were tiny lines branching from the corners of her eyes, very faint, still undoubtedly there; and the autumnal colour on her cheeks did not lie as evenly as it might.

These discoveries brought him a strange sense of relief. He had hitherto looked on her loveliness as unapproachable, and the thought of her physical perfection had been a mighty factor in

the war that had raged so devastatingly in his heart. But now he saw that it was no longer to be reckoned with. Tony was, in point of fact, more beautiful than Janey. His eyes travelled down from her face, and saw her collar all askew, her blouse hanging sloppily out at the waist, her shoe-string untied. Tony always wore such dainty muslins, such soft, pretty white things. . . . Then he noticed Janey's hair. For the first time he wondered whether she brushed it often enough.

His spirits revived wonderfully during this contemplation, and with them a surge of tender pity towards her. He did not want her to feel humiliated by his unfaithfulness.

"Janey, you mustn't think I don't thank you and honour you for all you've been to me."

"You don't know what I've been to you."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't realise what I've sacrificed for you. You talk of Tony Strife's purity and innocence as if it was more to her credit to have them than for me to have given them up—for your sake."

"Janey——"

"Listen, Quentin. There's one thing this girl will never do for you—I did it—and I think that now you despise me for it, in spite of your words. You don't know what it cost me. I did my best to hide my pain from you, because you were happy; but now I think you ought to know that this thing for which you despise me was—was the greatest act of self-sacrifice in my whole life. Oh, Quentin, I always meant to keep straight, because of my

brothers, and because—because I wanted to be pure and good. Oh, I loved goodness and purity—I love them still, quite as much as Tony Strife loves them—and there were the poor boys, with only my example to restrain them. And then I loved you—and you asked me to climb over the gates of Paradise with you, because they would never be unlocked. Oh, God! I yielded because I loved you so. I gave up what was dearer to me than anything else in the world, the one thing I was struggling to keep unspotted, for my own sake and the boys'. I gave it up to you—and now . . . and now . . . you talk about another woman's purity and innocence."

Her voice died into tearless silence.

"Janey, you mustn't feel like that—you mustn't think that I reproach you. It's myself I blame—not you."

"But you do—you do—and I ought to have known it from the first."

He could not speak, the words stuck to his tongue—he wanted to fall at her feet, but could not, for he knew it would be mockery.

"I can't say anything," he stammered huskily; "we're just the victims of a damnable mistake, and the less we say about it the better. Each word one of us speaks is a wound for the other. There's only this left—

> 'And throughout all eternity
> I forgive you, you forgive me—
> As our dear Redeemer said:
> This the wine and this the bread.'"

"You don't believe in the dear Redeemer, do you?"

"Of course not—but it's poetry."

They had neither of them realised that the interview was near an end, but these last words seemed to have finished it somehow. They were both standing, and the silence remained unbroken.

Then suddenly Janey moved. An absolutely new impulse had seized her. She went over to the glass, and looked at herself in it. Then she smoothed her hair, arranged her gown, made it tidy at the waist, and buttoned it at the wrists. Quentin watched her in blank wonder—he had never before seen her pay the slightest heed to her appearance. But to-day she stood a full five minutes before the glass, patting, smoothing, arranging—settling every fold of her careless garments with minutest care. Then she turned to him.

"Good-bye, Quentin."

Her head was held high—one would scarcely know her in her sleekness and order.

"Janey—you forgive me."

She did not speak.

"Janey—for God's sake!—oh, please forgive me!—because I've suffered so much, because I've wanted you so, because I've struggled to find redemption. . . ."

His eyes burned, full of entreaty. But at first she could not answer him. She moved slowly

towards the door, but stopped on the threshold, and looked back at him, her heart hot and sick in her breast with pity. She had never realised Quentin's youth so absolutely and heartrendingly as to-day.

"I forgive you," she said, "but not for any of those reasons. I forgive you because you are—oh, God!—only a boy."

CHAPTER IV

FLAMES

JANET walked quickly through the darkening country. A power from behind seemed to be driving her on—a hot, smoky power of uttermost shame. It was symbolised by the thunder-vapour that curled in the east, a black, swagging cloud that lumbered towards the sunset over reaches of heat-washed sky.

She hardly realised how she had won through that interview at Redpale Farm. The details were dim and jumbled in her memory, like the details of what has taken place just before an accident or during an illness. She hoped she had not been undignified, but really did not care very much about it. The tension which had characterised both her calmness and her hysteria was gone—her emotions seemed to flop. Unlike so many women, pride gave her no support in her dreadful hour.

But her feelings were merely relaxed, not subdued, and her loose, run-down nerves quivered as agonisedly as during their stretch and strain. The realisation of all she had lost swept over her heart, engulfing it. The very fields through which she walked were part of this realisation—it was here, or it was there, that she had stood with Quentin on such and such a day, or had watched him coming towards her out of the mist-blurred distance, or seen him go from her, stopping to

raise his arm in farewell, just there, where the foxgloves lifted purple poles in the ditches of Starswhorne. She could see the thickets of Furnace Wood, hazed over with heat—they were haunted now, she would never go near Furnace Wood again. Two ghosts wandered up and down its heat-baked paths, rustled in the hazels, and stood where the tufted hedge shut off Furnace Field —loving and dumb. They were not the ghosts of dead bodies, but of dead selves—of two who walked apart in distant ways, who would never again meet each other save in memory and in sleep.

A metallic hardness had dropped upon the day. The arch of the sky was steel, sunless, yet bright with a cold sheen; at the rim it dipped to copper, hot and sullen, save where in the west two brazen bars sent out harsh lights to rest on the fields and make them too like brass.

Janet at last reached Sparrow Hall, and as she did so, for the first time felt physical fatigue. It came upon her in a spasm—she was just able to stagger into the kitchen, and sink down in her accustomed chair, every muscle aching and exhausted, her head splitting with pain, and her body shuddering with a sudden and unaccountable sickness.

For some time she did not move, she just fought with the sheer physical discomfort of it all. Her head lay on the table, her arms were spread over the wood, and the collapsed line of her shoulders was of utter powerlessness and pain. Then two tears rolled slowly from her eyes—they were part of her physical plight, and for it alone she wept.

For the sorrow of her soul it seemed as if she could only weep dry salt.

Oh, merciful God!—Quentin looked upon her love as his ruin, and turned from her in panic to another woman. In this other love he would find the peace and happiness and goodness that Janey had ached and striven for years to give him; he would learn to forget the wicked Janey Furlonger, whose love had all but been his perdition, who had brought him to sin and torture and despair —and now would lie in the background of his heart, as an evil thing we cover up and pray to forget. This young, innocent girl would save him from his memories of the woman who had given more for his sake than Tony Strife would ever dream of giving. He did not realise her sacrifice —she had given up for his sake the innocence and purity that were more to her simple soul than life, and now he turned from her because she had them not.

Then for the first time a convulsion of wrath seized Janey. For the first time she saw the cruelty and outrage of it all. Her anger blazed up—against Quentin, against the world, against herself. His last letter lay on the tale. She seized it, and thrust it into the fire. Then she noticed the box that held his other letters. She seized that too, and crammed it into the grate. Long tongues of flame shot out, and suddenly one of them caught her dress—she screamed, flames and smoke seemed to wrap her round, and in madness she rushed to the door. A man was in the passage. He

grasped her, and held her to him, beating out the flames.

"Quentin!" she shrieked, "Quentin! Quentin!"

"Janey—darling sister! There! it's all over now. The fire's out. Are you much hurt?"

"Quentin! Quentin!"

Leonard picked her up bodily, and carried her into the kitchen, sitting down by the fire with her on his knee. He began to examine her. Her skirt was nothing but charred rags, her face and hands were black with grime, and there was a horrible smell of singed hair, but she did not seem to be actually burnt. She was trembling from head to feet, her face hidden against his breast.

"I don't think you're really hurt, dear. What a lucky chance I happened to be there! If I'd done as I said and gone to Cherrygarden, you might have been burnt to death. How did you do it, Janey?"

"I was burning Quentin's letters. . . . Oh, Quentin! Quentin!"

The last dregs of Janey's self-control were gone. Anxiety, shock, grief, humiliation, love, despair and sickening, physical fright, all crowded into a few short hours, had almost deprived her of her reason.

"Quentin! Quentin!" she cried, clinging to Leonard.

She was so tall that he had difficulty in holding her on his knee while she struggled.

"Janey, I can't understand, dearest. Who's Quentin?—not Quentin Lowe?"

"Yes — Quentin Lowe. Lenny, Lenny — he doesn't love me any more."

Leonard kissed her smoke-grimed face repeatedly. He was utterly bewildered.

"He doesn't love me any more," she continued, gasping. "He loves Tony Strife—he's going to marry her. Lenny, he's a devil."

"My darling, can't you tell me what it is? Did you ever love him?"

"Oh, I loved him! I loved him! I gave up all I had to him. Lenny, he thinks my love was his ruin . . . he wants to be happy and good, and he thinks he can't be either if he loves me . . . he says—

> 'And throughout all eternity
> I forgive you, you forgive me.'"

"My poor old Janey, I'm going to carry you upstairs."

"I can walk," and she tried to stand, but he had only just time to catch her.

"I'm going to carry you. Poor, poor Janey—see what a big baby you are."

He carried her up the rickety stairs, into her room, laying her on the bed.

"Would you like to undress?"

"No—no—Lenny, don't leave me."

He was in despair.

"Janey, dearest, I wish you'd tell me what's happened. I can't comfort you properly when I don't know. Do you really mean to say that you love Quentin Lowe?"

"I love him . . . oh, I love him . . . but he's a devil."

"Did he know?—did he love you?"

"Yes, he loved me . . . and he made me give up everything for his sake . . . and now he's going to marry another woman . . . oh, Lenny, Lenny, I want Nigel!"

"Janey—don't—I simply can't bear this. Don't give way so—he isn't worth it."

"Oh, I knew you'd say that."

"I won't say it if you don't like it. But don't be in despair—you'll soon feel better—you'll get over it. And meantime there's Nigel and me. . . ."

"Oh, I want Nigel!"

"I'll wire to him to come down for the week-end, after his concert."

"Lenny . . . you'll never forsake me?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"I don't expect—I daren't——"

"What do you mean?"

"The disgrace . . ."

He stared at her in bewilderment.

"Oh, Lenny . . . I don't think you understand."

She had made him understand at last—and in the process had strangely enough recovered something of her self-control. At first she had thought his brain could never receive this ghastly new impression; but gradually she had seen the colour fade from his lips, while a terrible sternness crept into his eyes; she had seen his hand go up to his

forehead with the swift yet uncertain movement of one who has been smitten.

"My God!"

Leonard stepped back from the bed.

She lay gazing at him like a drowning woman. She saw the stern lines of his mouth—had girls any right to expect their brothers to forgive them such things? Yet if Lenny turned from her . . . if she lost not only Quentin but the boys . . .

For a moment there was silence in the little room, with its faded reds and casement open to the fields.

Then suddenly Leonard sprang forward, stooped, and caught Janey in his arms, turning her face to his breast.

They clung together in silence, both trembling. The first faint wind of the evening crept in and ruffled their hair.

"You won't love me so much now."

"I will love you more—but, by God! I'll kill that man!"

"No—no!—Len, no!"

"Hush, dear, don't get excited again."

"But you must promise . . . he—he's only a boy."

"Boy be damned! He's a skunk—he's a loathly little reptile, that's all. He isn't worthy to sweep out your cinders, and he—oh, God, Janey! I'd give my life to-morrow for the privilege of wringing his neck to-night."

"Len, promise me you won't hurt him—I—I shall die if you do."

"Well, I'll promise to leave him alone for the present, because I've got you to look after. I want you to go to sleep, dear. Do you think you could sleep?"

"I'm sure I couldn't."

"You could if I mixed you some nice hot brandy and water. Let me go downstairs and get some."

"Oh, Lenny—I'm frightened of being alone."

"But it won't take me a minute—the kettle's on the fire."

The combined longing for a stimulant and for oblivion was too intense for Janey to resist.

"You're sure you won't be long?"

"Yes—I promise—just down and up again."

"Then thank you, Len."

He went down to the kitchen, and mixed a pretty stiff grog—for himself. Janey had been too overwrought to notice that her brother was trembling and flushed, and that there was a strange, drawn look about his face. He had turned back half-way to Cherrygarden because he felt "queer," and to this no doubt she owed her life. In the horror and confusion of the last half-hour he had forgotten his own illness, but now it was growing upon him, and he must fight it for her sake. He drank a tumblerful of brandy and water, then mixed some for Janey, and went upstairs.

He helped her take off her charred skirt and bodice, and wrapped her in a dressing-gown. He bathed her smoky face and hands, then he pulled a rug over her, and gave her the brandy. It was a strong dose for a woman, and in spite of all she had said she was soon asleep.

He sat down beside her and closed his eyes. The soft air fanned him, and the scents of the little garden steamed up and scattered themselves in the room.

Janey lay with her head sunk deep in the pillow, her face half-buried in it, and her breathing came heavily, almost in sobs. Her knees were drawn up, and her arms crossed on her breast, the hands twisted together—there was something pathetic and childish in the huddled attitude.

Leonard thought to himself—

"It's nearly time for Nigel's concert—I wonder if he's thinking of Janey and me."

CHAPTER V

COWSANISH

LEONARD dozed a little, but he did not sleep. A leaden weariness was in his limbs, but his heart and brain were horribly active, forbidding rest. His heart was full of rage, and his brain was full of images—he could doze only till these last crystallised in dreams, when their vividness woke him up at once. He woke each time with a start and a vague feeling of uneasiness and alarm. He feared he was going to be ill—just when Janey needed him so badly. He must bear up till to-morrow; by then she would be better, to-night she was helpless without him. He looked at the cramped figure on the bed, and his throat tightened with sorrow, shame and rage.

She should be avenged—he swore it. Lowe should be made to realise that it was not with impunity that one dragged women like Janey into the mud and then climbed out over their shoulders. He should be made to grovel to her and implore her forgiveness. Len had not quite settled his course of action, but he had fixed the results. Lowe was a worm, a miserable, loathly, little, wriggling worm, and he had slimed a lily—he should squirm under a decent man's boot. . . .

The room darkened. The curtains, fluttering in the dusk-wind, were like ghosts. The line of woods on the horizon became dim, and an owl

called from them suddenly. Then a procession of clouds began to flit solemnly across the window —driven from the south-west. They were brown against the bottomless grey, and there was a kind of majestic rhythm in their march before the wind.

Len rose with a shudder—somehow he could not sit still. He went to the window and looked out. Then he remembered that he had not shut in the fowls for the night or stalled the cows. He would have to leave Janey for a little and attend to the farm. He stepped back and looked at her. Her bed was in darkness, and all he could see was a long, black mass on the paleness of the bed-clothes. She was sleeping heavily, with quick, stertorous breathing, and it was not likely that she would wake for some time—he had certainly better go now, while she slept so well.

He crept quietly from the room and down the dark stairs. Outside the breeze puffed healingly upon him, cooling him with a sweet dampness as he climbed into the stream-field where the cows were pastured. The mists were too high and clammy for them to be left out at night, and the man had gone home after milking them. He called to them softly, and great shadows began to move out of the fogs towards him. The peace of the twilight and of his work with the calm, milk-smelling beasts, was so great that, in spite of rage and suffering, a kind of dreamy comfort came to Len—a quiet he felt only in the fields. He began to whistle as he drove the cows home before him. Then suddenly the whistling made him remember Nigel's concert.

He had meant to send off a second telegram, which Nigel would receive just before he went on the platform at the Bechstein. The last shattering hour had made him forget his plan, and he realised that if his brother was to have his message of good-cheer it must be sent at once. But how? There was still time, but he could not leave the house, even on such an errand—and yet his brother must be " bucked up " at all costs. To-morrow he would send another wire, asking him to come down for the week-end, but he thought it as well not to risk alarming him to-night. Len pondered a minute, then suddenly it occurred to him that he could give his telegram to the postman, who was due to pass Sparrow Hall on his way back from his round. By a lucky chance there was a telegraph-form in the house; Len filled it in, and then ran out with it to the lane.

He looked up at Janey's window—all was quiet, only the white curtains fluttered out on the wind; anyhow he would hear if she woke and called him. The lane was very dark—the sky was still faintly light above it, but night had fallen between the hedges. He heard footsteps, and saw a figure coming down Wilderwick hill.

" Hullo, Winkworth! " he cried, " I want you to do something for me."

He stepped out into the middle of the lane, and at the same time the figure began to climb the stile into Wilderwick meadows.

" Hi! " shouted Len—he suddenly realised that on fine dry nights the postman would take the field-path to Dormans.

'Hi!" he shouted, running after him. "Winkworth!—I've a——"

The words died on his tongue. He had reached the stile, and saw standing on the further side of it, on the high ground which the darkness had not reached—with the last of the western light upon his face—Quentin Lowe.

For a moment both men stared at each other, then Lowe moved away. Len stood stock still, a queer grimace on his features.

"Were you calling me, sir?"

A voice behind him made him start. The postman had come out of the darkness and stood at his elbow.

"I thought I heard you shout 'Winkworth' when I was far up the hill. Anything you want, Mus' Furlonger?"

"Yes—yes—would you take this telegram to Dormans, and see it sent off? Here's a bob. . . ."

His voice sounded vague, somehow, as if it were a mechanical process unconnected with his real self. He stood watching the old postman as he climbed the stile and took the turning for Dormans, where the track divided. A minute later a figure became silhouetted against the sky on his right; the path to Cowden and the valley farms dipped abruptly a few yards beyond the stile, then climbed to the high grounds near Goatsluck Wood. Quentin Lowe was clearly visible as he hurried away towards Kent—almost as if he feared pursuit.

Leonard stared after him, his eyes bright with hate and fever. A kind of delirium was in his

brain as he watched that thick-set, slouching figure, caricatured into a dwarf by his fury and the cheverel light. Then suddenly he bounded forward.

He forgot all about the illness that was creeping over him, and Janey alone in the dark house. Or rather, he told himself that he would be up with Quentin in a minute, and would have settled him in a couple more. He would drag him back to Sparrow Hall by the scruff of the neck, and Janey, poor, outraged Janey, should be his judge, and taste triumph even in her despair.

He climbed the stile and ran up the path, plunging recklessly through the tall, ghostly buttercups, glowing faintly in the twilight. He had soon lost the path, a mere borstall, and was trampling the hay-grass, but he did not slack.

Quentin had for the moment disappeared. The trees of Goatsluck Wood waved against the sky: Len was conscious of a kind of illusion as he approached them—it seemed as if they were very far away, then suddenly he found himself on the tangled rim of the wood, the boughs shuddering and rustling over him, as he groped his way into the darkness.

He had to run along the hedge till he found the stile, and he realised that Lowe now had a good start. But he would not stop, nor defer his vengeance to another, more auspicious, day. Janey would probably not wake till the next morning—and meantime his blood was up. He was not quite sure what he should do to Quentin when he overtook him—he was not worth killing, that would

only mean more sorrow for Janey, but he had ideas of pounding him more or less to a jelly and then dragging him back to Sparrow Hall and making him kiss the ground at Janey's feet, and grovel and slobber for her forgiveness, with other humiliations which he did not think for a minute his sister would not enjoy.

Meantime he floundered stupidly among the trees. The path was not often used, and the undergrowth had become tangled across it—branches of ash and hazel whipped his cheeks, and brambles caught his feet and sent him stumbling. Once he fell full length, with the soft suck of mud under his body, and once he had to stop and fight for his breath which had been knocked out of him by the low bough of an oak. It was very dark in Goatsluck Wood—like a dark dream. He looked up and saw shuddering patches of sky, and they intensified the strange dream spell, for he seemed to be moving through them, tossed by the wind and scorched by whirling stars.

Then suddenly a meadow swam towards him—another meadow full of buttercups, all gleaming faintly in the marriage of twilight and moonlight that revelled over the fields. A soft wind baffed him, and cooled his lips with little drops of rain. He pounded on through the buttercups, thought and self-consciousness both almost swallowed up in the abnormal consciousness of environment that accompanies certain states of fever. He saw the moon hanging low and yellow in the east, he saw long, tangled hedges, and tufts of wood—and all round him, in meadow after meadow, that ceaseless

shimmer of buttercups, as the wind puffed through them and bowed them to the moon.

Then suddenly he saw Quentin Lowe. His pace had slackened, for he had not seen Furlonger for some minutes, but the next moment he looked over his shoulder and hurried on again.

"Stop!" cried Leonard.

The figure hunched itself against the wind and plunged on.

"Stop!" gasped Len, and calling up all his strength broke into a run.

Quentin looked back, and saw that he was running. He himself was too proud to run, but he doubled against the hedge, and changing his direction, walked towards Langerish, so that Len nearly overran him.

But just in time he saw the short, heavy figure groping along the rim of the buttercups, and the chase took a southward direction.

Len had not the breath to run far—he wondered vaguely what had winded him. He came panting after Quentin, always the same distance behind; he no longer cried "Stop!"—just padded gasping after him.

They skirted the meadow known as Watch Oak, then followed the grass lane to Golden Pot and the outhouses of Anstiel. Quentin was trying to work his way back towards Kent and the valley of the hammer ponds, but Leonard drove him obstinately southwards. He was beginning to gain on him a little. Quentin could hear his footsteps, and he knew why he was following him.

A sick dread was creeping up Lowe's back—he looked round at the shuddering woods and that strange sky of storm and stars, and he trembled with the presentiment that he saw them all for the last time. Furlonger was a great, big, burly brute —and Furlonger would kill him. Perhaps, after all, he deserved to die—the country through which he plunged in this horrible death-chase had a reproach in each spinney, a regret in each field. And yet his heart was stiff with defiance—what right had the gods to dangle salvation before a man's eyes, and then slay him when he grasped it? A sob rose in his throat. The gates of Paradise had rolled back for him at last—and must he die just inside them?

His defiance grew. He would not be robbed of his salvation. To grasp it he had let go more than he dared think. The gods should not mock him with their gifts—or rather, merchandise. They should not take his awful price, and then deny the goods. Life should not suddenly turn and smile on him, and then hurry away. He called after departing Life—"I will not let thee go except thou bless me. . . ."

He bent his head and began to run.

Then suddenly his mood changed. The power that had steadied his voice and straightened his back during his terrible interview with Janey, had not forsaken him now. He loved Tony Strife, and he was too proud in her love to play the coward. He would not run away from fate. It should not be said of Tony's lover that he had died running

away. He stopped abruptly, swung round and faced Furlonger.

Leonard was so surprised at this change of tactics that for a moment he did not speak. He stood staring at Lowe, his hands clenched, his muscles taut, his veins boiling and throbbing. The two men faced each other in the corner of a high field known as Cowsanish. On one side a hedgerow was whispering with winds, on the other the ground sloped downwards to a ruined out-house—then it dipped suddenly, and the distance was full of mists, through which could be seen blotches of woods and farmhouse lights. The sky was still wind-swept and scattered with stars.

"What do you want?" asked Lowe at last.

Leonard mumbled a little before he spoke. "To wring your neck."

"Why?"

"You know why."

Furlonger's mouth was working with passion, and his eyes were deliriously bright. He really meant to wring Lowe's neck. He had forgotten his earlier schemes of vengeance—nothing would suffice him now but the extreme, the uttermost.

Lowe folded his arms across his chest, and called up all his memories of Tony.

"You want to kill me," he said in a struggling voice, "because of what I've done to Janey—but I tell you it's been a blessing to her as well as to me. We were both in the mud together, and now I've got out it'll be easier for her to do so."

"You've blighted her with your damned love!" cried Leonard incoherently, "she's half dead, she's

in the mud, she's in hell. When you got out, as you call it, you kicked her deeper in."

"But there's no good killing me for it."

"Why?"

Len asked the question almost lamely. He felt giddy and inert, and Quentin's words seemed to be trickling past him somehow—it was a strange feeling he could not quite realise.

"Why?—because you'll probably be hanged for it, and that won't do your sister any good. Besides"—and here his voice quickened suddenly into passion—"you've no right to kill me for grasping my only chance of salvation."

"Damn your salvation!—I'm not going to kill you for getting out of the ditch, but for dragging her into it—Janey, my sister, whose shoes you aren't worthy to clean."

Lowe quailed for a moment. Furlonger's eyes were blazing, and he crouched back as if for a spring.

"There's no good gassing about it," he said thickly, "if I let you talk, you'll talk me stupid. I'm going to wring your neck because you dragged my Janey into your own beastly hell, and then when you saw the chance, climbed out over her shoulders, and left her to rot there. She's ill, I tell you—she's half dead—and I'm going to kill you for it."

Quentin flung a last imploring look at the silent fields with their waving, whispering grass. The clouds were scattering now, and the sky blazed with stars. The night was full of the scent of hay. . . . In a moment they would be lost in a black,

choking whirl, that sky, those stars—that sweet smell of hay. He sniffed at it. He thought of the huge mown meadow by Shovelstrode, where only yesterday he and Tony had lounged and played. He heard the voices of the workers, as they turned the great swathes, and shook them on their forks, filling the air with fragrance; he saw Tony in a muslin frock, with the white rose he had given her in her breast. He saw the sun on the coils of her mouse-coloured hair—heard her say some little, trivial, slangy thing that had somehow made him kiss her. He remembered that kiss, so sweet, so cool, so calm—and, as he drew back his head, the look of her innocent eyes. . . .

But once more the thought of Tony put courage into him. If he must die inside the gates of Paradise, he would die worthily of the woman who had opened them to him. For her sake he would die game—it was the only thing he had left to do for her now. He would die with a proud face and a high courage—and his last conscious thought should be of Tony, who, if only for a few short days, had allowed him to see what love can be when it comes in white.

He braced himself up, flung back his shoulders, and waited for the attack.

It came.

Furlonger sprang forward and seized Quentin by the throat. For a moment they swayed together, Lowe snatching at the other's hands and struggling with the frenzy of despair. His eyes bulged, his lips blackened, and still he fought. Then the

darkness began to rush over him—first in little clouds, then in long, black sweeps.

"Janey! . . . Janey!" he cried.

He opened his eyes at last. He was lying under the hedge, his cheek scratched, his hands twisted in the grass. He stirred feebly, then sat up, still crouching back against the hazel. Furlonger lay prone among the buttercups, his chin turned up sharply, the moonlight blazing on his face. Then Lowe remembered how things had happened—how the sickening grip on his throat had suddenly relaxed, and he had gone crashing backwards into the brambles, while something fell with a heavy thud at his feet.

He wondered if Furlonger was dead. He went and looked into his face. The features were strangely drawn, and there was a look of desperate anxiety in their contraction. Then suddenly the eyes opened and looked up into Lowe's, full of terror and fever.

"What's happened? Who's there? Oh, my God!"

Remembrance had come with a spasm of that ghastly face. Leonard sat up in the grass, and held his hands to his head.

"I'm ill, I think," he muttered.

He must have fainted—fainted through the stress and horror of it all, just when his enemy's breath had nearly sobbed away under his hands.

"You'd better go home," said Quentin.

Leonard did not speak. He still sat there in a

piteous huddle—and then suddenly tremor after tremor began to go through him. He shuddered from head to foot, his teeth chattered, and his limbs shook so that he could not rise.

"I want some water—I want something to drink," he panted.

Quentin put his hands under his shoulders to help him get up. He felt quite generously towards him now. He had been snatched by a timely accident from death, and could afford to pity this poor fellow who had tried to kill him, but failed.

"Let me help you home."

"No—by God!"

"Let me—you're ill."

"Yes, I was ill when I started after you—or you wouldn't be alive and grinning at me now. I was a fool—I should have waited. But look out for me another day, you skunk!"

The ghastly rigor choked his last words. The look of terror and anxiety deepened on his face. Then at last he managed to stumble up.

"I—I'm going home," he stuttered, and felt sick as he realised he would have to pass again through Goatsluck Wood.

"And you won't let me go with you?"

"No—I shan't let myself owe you anything, for I mean to kill you some day."

"I advise you not to threaten me—I might be obliged to take proceedings against you."

"A pretty mess you'd be in if you did. I suppose you don't want your new girl to hear about Janey?"

Quentin flushed.

"If I wasn't obliged to shield my sister," continued Len, "I'd tell that girl myself. But you know my tongue's tied—besides, I'd rather kill you."

"The secret might come out that way too. No, Furlonger, if you are wise you'll let me alone."

He drew back a little as he spoke—the friendly reaction was passing. He had always hated Janey's brothers, because he was jealous of her love for them; and now, though the original reason was gone, he still hated them for the cause of that reason—for what he believed was the foundation of Janey's love, their physical strength and fitness.

However, there was not much of either to be seen in Leonard now. He swayed pitifully as he stood there facing Quentin, and though his lips moved, no sounds came past them. Then he turned away. Lowe watched him stagger across the field. He expected him to fall every minute, except once, when for some strange reason he expected him to turn back and confront him again. But he neither fell nor turned. He stumbled blindly on, then disappeared into the next field.

For a moment or two Quentin stood alone in the great meadow, under the hurrying sky. The scent of hay no longer blew to him wistfully, but triumphantly, like the fragrance of festal wine. He spread out his arms, and stood there in the quivering, scented hush, while the wind cooled his damp forehead, and ruffled the hair back from it tenderly.

Then he turned homewards from Cowsanish.

But he had not gone far before he altered his direction. He struck again southwards, through the grass lanes that wind past Old Surrey Hall, towards Shovelstrode. He would lay his thankfulness, his deliverance, his redemption, at Tony's feet—at the feet of the woman who symbolised them all.

CHAPTER VI

AND I ALSO DREAMED

BEHIND the stage at the Bechstein Hall one could hear the applause that burst from the auditorium. Nigel listened hungrily. He wondered whether those hands would clap and those feet stamp when it was his turn to leave the platform, his violin under his arm. He stood leaning against the wall, his fiddle already out of its case, but still wrapped tenderly in silks. The little group of girls and men who were whispering together not far off sent him from time to time glances of mingled curiosity and admiration.

There was a big difference between the convict with his close-cropped hair and disreputable clothes, and this young man in orthodox evening dress, whose hair was brushed in a heavy, shining mass from his forehead, to hang over his ears and neck in the approved musician's style. Nigel had been unable to resist this rather primitive piece of swank—besides, it was symbolical, it marked the contrast between what he had been in the days of his shame, and what he was now in the days of regeneration. The girl who had just come off the stage stared at him half amused, half envying.

"Do you come on soon?"

"Yes—after this next thing."

"Just a little bit nervous?"

He nodded.

As a matter of fact, he was in a mortal funk. He would not have believed it possible that he could be afraid of a crowd of strangers, who were nothing to him and to whom he was nothing. But infinite things were at stake. If he failed, if he made an ass of himself, he pushed further away, if not altogether out of sight, the dream in which for the last six months he had worked and lived. On the other hand, if he succeeded, if to-morrow's papers took his name out of the gutter, just as four years ago they had helped to kick it in, his dream would be transmuted into hope. The violin he clutched so desperately was no mere instrument of music, but an instrument of redemption, the token of that dear salvation which if a man but see truly he must grasp.

Six months had gone by since he left Sparrow Hall, and during them he had worked desperately with scanty rest. He had flung his proud self-will and undisciplined love of prettiness into mechanical exercises for fingers and bow, he had subjected his taste for the tuneful and sentimental to Herr von Gleichroeder's dissonantal preferences. But he had been happy—his dream had always been with him, and had breathed all the sentimentality of hope into the dry bones of Chabrier, Chausson and Strauss. He had found it everywhere—even in his bow exercises.

He was happy, too, in his environment—the companionship of his fellow-students with their young, clear spirits and enthusiasm. Most of them knew his story, but in their careless code it did not tell much against him, for every one

admired him for his originality and liked him for his desperate pluck. So Nigel found a new form of gratification for that strange part of him born in prison. The companionship of an unripe little school-girl with her slang, the sight of children dancing in the dusk, had been succeeded by many a racket with young men and women of his own age—Bohemian supper-parties, followed by impromptu concerts or startling variety turns; expeditions in rowdy throngs to a theatre or music-hall; small, friendly meals with some fellow-enthusiast, who confessed in private an admiration for Gounod. . . . It was a draught of new life to him; he loved it all—down to the constant musical jargon, the endless "shop." Much of his bitterness was leaving him, his sullen bouts were rarer, even the lines of his face were growing rounded and more boyish.

Chausson's "Chanson Perpetuelle" drawled and wailed its way towards a close. Nigel's muscles tightened to prevent a shudder. To-night the hall would be full of the friends and relations of the students; they had come out to encourage their respective prodigies, and his item on the programme would belong, so to speak, to no one. He almost wished he had not forbidden Len and Janey to come—at least they would have made a noise.

The thought of Len and Janey brought an additional stake into the game. He must succeed for their sakes too. He must justify to them his departure from Sparrow Hall. If he failed, they would look upon it as a mere piece of obstinate

cruelty, they would plague him to return, and he, in all the sickness of failure, would find it hard to resist them.

Another round of applause . . . the "Chanson Perpetuelle" had ended, and the singer, a self-confident little contralto, came off, with the string quartet which had accompanied her. Herr von Gleichroeder bustled up, and there was some talk of an encore, which was in the end refused. Then he turned to Nigel.

"You'd better go on at once. Here are two telegrams for you—but you mustn't wait."

Nigel stuffed the two yellow envelopes into his pocket, and moved mechanically towards the stage. Two telegrams—a sick hope was in his heart—one was from Len, he knew; but the other . . . Tony knew the date of his concert; perhaps. . . . He dared not think it, yet that "perhaps" made him hold his head high as he walked on the stage.

He bowed stiffly. Von Gleichroeder had spent a long time trying to teach him a graceful bow. He remembered his last public appearance, and it made him not only stiff but a trifle hard. There was no applause at first—no one in the hall knew him; then a kind-hearted old lady felt sorry for the poor young man who had no one to encourage him, and gave a feeble clap, which was more disconcerting than silence.

The accompanist struck the chord—his fiddle was soon in tune and he lifted it to his shoulder. A cold chill ran down his back—he had entirely forgotten the first bars of the Prelude.

The accompanist had some preliminary business. Nigel listened to him in detached horror, as if he were the spectator of some dreadful scene with which he had absolutely no connection. He heard the music crashing through familiar phrases—only five bars more—only three—only one—

Then there was a pause-bar—a very long pause.

Then suddenly he realised that he had been playing for some time. The violin was warm under his chin, the bow warm between his fingers. He knew that if he stopped to think about it all, he was lost. It was always fatal for him to think of his music as so many little black signs on paper, and it was nearly as fatal for him to think of it as so many movements of his bow or positions of his fingers. Von Gleichroeder had always had to combat his pupil's tendency to play almost entirely by ear, lost meanwhile in a kind of sentimental dream—in the transports of which he swayed violently from side to side and generally looked ridiculous.

To-night he slapped into the Scriabin with tremendous vigour—the infinite pains he had spent during the last six months showing clearly in the ease with which he surmounted its technical difficulties. But the watchful ear of von Gleichroeder told him that his pupil was playing subconsciously, so to speak—from his heart, rather than his head. If anything—the slipping of a peg or a sudden noise in the hall—were to interrupt him, to wake him up, all would be lost.

But luckily nothing happened. Nigel was

roused only by the last crash of his bow on the strings. The Prelude was finished, and at the same time a desperate panic seized him. He forgot to bow, and bolted headlong from the stage.

The audience applauded heartily, and his fellow-students crowded round him with congratulations.

"Well done, old man!—pulled it off splendidly," and his back was vigorously thumped.

"Worked up beautifully over the climax."

"But played G instead of B in the last bar but one," added a precise youth.

"Muddled your runs in that chromatic bit," put in some one else, encouraged.

"Go on and bow—go on and bow," blustered von Gleichroeder, hurrying up.

Nigel bowed perfunctorily and came back. The clapping did not subside.

"I don't allow encores," said the German, "but you're in luck, my friend, in luck."

The colour was darkening on Nigel's face. It was his hour of triumph. He wished Tony was there, and Janey and Leonard—he would let them come to his next concert.

He went on and bowed again—he had to appear several times before the demand for an encore was given up as hopeless, and the applause gradually died away.

He went to the back of the stage and sat down, holding his head in his hands. He wanted to be alone, and to read his telegrams. The future was now a flaming promise—his feet at last were set on the honourable way. He let his mind lose

itself in its dream, and for a moment he was conscious of nothing but infinite hope. From the stage a plaintive, bizarre air of Moussorgski's came to him. To be Russian was to von Gleichroeder synonymous with to be modern, and Moussorgski and Rimsky Korsakov were encouraged where their French or Italian contemporaries were banned. Every now and then a little slow ripple brought an end to strange wailing dissonances; it was played without much fire—without much feeling—but it haunted.

Nigel opened his first telegram. It read—

"Go it, old chap—laurels is cheap."

That was from Leonard, and a half tender, half humorous smile crept over Furlonger's grim mouth. Dear old Len!—dear old Janey! How he wished they were there! He would wire to them the first thing to-morrow and tell them of his success.

Then suddenly the smile passed away, and his hands shook a little. Who had sent the second telegram?

He tore nervously at the envelope. Had Tony remembered him? one word of encouragement from her was worth all the clappings and stampings of the audience, all the eulogies of the press. . . .

> "And I also dreamed, which pleased me most,
> That you loved me still the same. . ."

He took out the telegram and unfolded it. It ran—

"Come at once. Leonard is ill. Janey."

CHAPTER VII

WOODS AT NIGHT

THE little star melody wailed on, rippled characteristically and died. Even then Nigel did not move, he sat with his hands dropped between his knees, still holding Janey's telegram. He seemed to be sitting alone, in a black corner of space, stricken, blank, forsaken.

Then suddenly he recovered himself. "Come at once." He must go at once. He sprang to his feet, pushed his way past one or two meaningless shadows who called after him meaningless words, and the next minute found himself in the passage behind the stage. Seizing his hat and overcoat from the wall, he hurried to the stage-door. The street outside was quiet, at either end were lights and commotion, but the street itself was plunged in echoing peace. A strange fear assaulted Nigel—he hurried into Oxford Street and hailed a taxi. Then he knew what he was afraid of—the opportunity to sit and think.

He tried not to think—he tried to find refuge from thought even in the words that had smitten him. "Come at once. Leonard is ill."—he repeated them over and over, striving for mere mechanical processes. The taxi threaded swiftly through the traffic, the lights swung past with the roar and the whistles. Luckily the streets were not

much crowded at that hour—it was just before the closing of the theatres and the consequent rush. . . .

He was at Victoria, and a porter had told him that the next train for East Grinstead did not start for half-an-hour. He paced miserably up and down, cursing the blank time, gnawed by conjectures. "Leonard is ill." Len was hardly ever ill, and it must be something serious, or Janey would not have said "Come at once." It must have been sudden too, for the two telegrams had been handed to him together. Perhaps there had been an accident. Perhaps Len was dead. Ice seemed to form suddenly on Nigel's heart—Janey might be trying to break the news gently by saying his brother was ill. No doubt Len was dead—— Oh, Lenny, Lenny!

A strange thing had happened. The dream in which he had lived and worked and slept and eaten for the last six months had suddenly fallen back from him, leaving him utterly alone with his brother and sister. His life in London, with all its struggle and ambition, was as something far off, unreal; no part of his life seemed real, except what he had spent with Len and Janey. After all did anything really matter as much as they? They had been with him always, and his dream had sustained him only a few months. He thought of their childhood together in the old Sussex house, of their adventures and scrapes and hide-and-seeks; he thought of their growing-up, of the wonderful discoveries they had made about themselves, and shared; he thought of their arrival at Sparrow Hall,

full of pluck and plans, of the difficulties that had damped the one and dashed the other—of the awful disgrace that had separated the three Furlongers for damnable years. Len and Janey had been his pals, his comrades, his comforters before he had so much as heard of Tony. She was not dethroned, his dream was not dead, but the past which he had half impatiently thrust behind him was coming back to show that it, as well as the future, held treasures and the immortality of love.

The half-hour was nearly over, and the platform was dotted with men and women in evening dress, who had come up from the country to the theatres, and now were going home by the last train. Nigel shut himself into a third-class carriage. The train was not very crowded, and no one disturbed him. Almost mechanically he lighted a cigarette, then leaned back, closing his eyes.

The train began to move—it pulled itself together with a shudder, then slid slowly out of the station. Signal lights swept past, whistles wailed up out of the darkness and died away—suburban stations gleamed—then the train swung out into the night.

Both the windows were wide open, and the wind blew in on Nigel, but he did not notice it. His cigarette had gone out, but he still sucked and bit the end, filling his mouth with strings of tobacco, which he did not notice either, though every now and then he mechanically spat them out. All he was conscious of was the pungent smell of night,

which invaded even the rushing train. He knew that the trees were heavy and the hedges tangled with their green—he tried to fling his imagination into some sheltered hollow by a wood, and find rest there. He tried to think of sheep and grass and flowers and watching stars. But it was no use —the night was full of the restlessness of the pulsing train, he could not escape from the train, which throbbed like his heart, and by its throbbing seemed to hold his heart a prisoner in it, as if some mysterious astral link connected the two pulses. The train was the heart of the night and darkness, pulsing in ceaseless despair, and he was the heart of the train, pulsing despairingly too, the very centre of sorrow. It was a definite strain for him to realise this, and yet somehow the sensation would not relax—it was infinite relief when at last the great, noisy heart, the heart of the train, stopped beating, though its silence brought with it a sudden wrench and shock, like death.

Nigel stumbled out on the East Grinstead platform, his limbs cramped, his head swimming. He thought of taking a cab, but by the time he had roused up the local livery stables and set off in one of their concerns he could almost have reached Sparrow Hall by the fields. A walk would do him good. The night was fine, though it smelled of rain.

He had soon left the town behind him, and struck across the fields by St. Margaret's convent. There was no moon, but the stars were unusually lustrous, and the distance was clear, Oxted chalk

quarry showing a pale scar on the northern hills. Now and then dark sweeps of cloud passed swiftly overhead, and the wind came in sudden gusts, whistling over the fields, and throbbing through the woods with a great swish of leaves. Nigel had not seen the Three Counties since Easter, which had been early and bleak. The London months since then had to a certain extent denaturalised him, and he was conscious of a vague strangeness in the fields. It was, moreover, four years since he had seen them in their June lushness—the scent of grass was brought him pungently now and then, the scent of leaves, the scent of water.

He crossed from Sussex into Surrey at Hackenden, then plunged through Ashplats Wood into the Wilderwick road. His footsteps were like shadows on the awful silence that filled the night. The stars were flashing from a coal-black sky—between the high hedges only a wisp of the great waste was visible with its dazzle of constellations. Nigel saw Cancer burning his lamps in the west, while straight above him hung the sign of Libra, brilliant, cold, unearthly. Surely the stars were larger and brighter to-night than was normal, than was good. He wished he was at Sparrow Hall. It could not be that he was frightened of the stars, and yet somehow they seemed part of an evil dream. Perhaps he would wake to find himself in his Notting Hill lodgings—perhaps his dream would go on for ever, eternal, malevolent, but still a dream—he would lie on in his bed at Notting Hill, and people would shake him and try to wake

him, and, when they could not wake him, take him and bury him—and he would lie in the earth, deep, with a stone over him—but still with his awful dream of night and high hedges, terror and stars. . . .

He had come to Sparrow Hall. He saw the tall, black chimney against a mass of stars—it seemed to be canting a little, perhaps that was part of the dream. There was a light in Len's room, and the next moment some one moved between it and the window.

"Janey . . ." called Nigel softly.

His voice rose with the scents of the garden, in the hush of the night. The next minute there were footsteps on the stairs, then the door flew open, and Janey was in Nigel's arms.

They clung together for several moments. The door had slammed in the draught, and the darkness crept softly round them like an embrace. The dream slipped from Nigel—his silly and hideous nightmare of stars. This quivering, tear-stained woman in his arms had brought him into the reality of sorrow.

"Where is he?—what's happened?" he asked, still holding Janey.

"He's upstairs in bed—he's very ill, Nigel."

"But he's not dead?"

"Not yet."

"Is there any hope?"

"Not much—he's got pneumonia. It's dreadful."

"Has the doctor seen him?"

"Yes—he's been gone only an hour. He said

you were to be sent for at once. Oh, Nigel, Nigel, it's my fault!"

"What d'you mean?"

"I was wretched and selfish—he'd been queer all the afternoon, and I didn't notice it. I thought only of myself. Then he went out while I was asleep, and when he came back. . . . Oh, Nigel! . . . the doctor says he practically did for himself by going out then."

Nigel did not understand, but his mind made no effort to grasp at details.

"I'd better go at once," he said; "is he conscious?"

"Yes—but he says funny things sometimes."

She led the way upstairs, and the next minute they were in Leonard's room. It was a queer little room, extremely low, with bulging walls, sagging beams and an uneven floor. Len lay propped very high with pillows. His face was drawn and feverish—he was literally fighting for his breath, and his lips were blue.

He smiled when he saw Nigel.

"Hullo, old man! . . . good of you to come. . . . Lord!"—as he saw his clothes—"put me among the nuts."

"Don't talk," said his brother sharply.

"Your hair . . ." panted Len.

"Shut up!"

Len pointed to a glass of water by the bed. Janey gave him a drink. He began to cough violently, and his face became purple. Nigel felt sick.

"I—I'm better," gasped Leonard. "I—I had . . . a beastly stitch . . . but it's gone."

"When's the doctor coming again?" Nigel asked Janet.

"The first thing to-morrow."

"He ought to have a nurse."

"Oh, no!" cried Len; "you and Janey can manage me . . . between you . . . I'll soon be all right . . . I don't want any little Tottie Cough-drop fussing round."

"He's dreadful," said Janey, "he will talk."

"How long has he been like this?"

"As I tell you, he'd been feeling queer all the afternoon. Then I crocked up for some silly reason, and instead of being properly attended to, he had to look after me"—a sob broke into her voice, and she pulled Nigel aside. "The doctor says it's a frightfully acute case," she whispered.

"But . . . but——" interrupted Len, "Nigel hasn't told us . . . about the concert . . . where's the laurel crown? . . . left it in the train?"

"Oh, do shut up! I'll tell you anything you like if you'll hold your tongue."

"Tell him while I'm giving him his milk," said Janey; "the doctor ordered him milk every two hours, but he simply won't take it."

"I'll make him," said his brother grimly.

"I'll go and fetch it—you stay with him, Nigel."

She left the room, and Len lay silent a moment, looking out at the stars.

"Old man," he whispered suddenly, "while Janey's away . . . I want to tell you something."

"What is it?—can't it wait till you're better?"

"No. . . . It's this. . . . She . . . she's in . . . infernal trouble."

Nigel quailed.

"What is it, Len?"

"She'd rather tell you herself . . . she's going to . . . all I want to say is . . . when you hear, just remember that . . . she's our Janey."

CHAPTER VIII

VIGIL

THE doctor called early the next morning, and looked serious. Leonard had had a restless night, and his symptoms were becoming very grave. He still kept up his efforts at conversation, though they were more painful than ever.

"I—I'm not going to die, Doc," he panted.

"Well, keep quiet, and we'll see about it," said the doctor.

"But have you heard about my brother? . . . the one who fills the Albert Hall? . . . Oh, 'ninety-nine,' since you insist."

Nigel had been sent over to Dormans the first thing in the morning, to buy up all the papers he could. Several of them had a report of von Gleichroeder's concert, and most of these mentioned Nigel's performance favourably.

"Mr. Furlonger has undoubtedly a great deal to learn on the mechanical side of his art, but he has a wonderful force of temperament, which last night compensated in many ways for faulty technique. He even managed to work some emotional beauty into Scriabin's bundle of tricks, and one can imagine that in music which depended on the beautiful instead of on the bizarre for its appeal, he would have the chance, which was denied him last night, of a really fine performance. We do not say that Mr. Furlonger will ever be a master, but if he will avoid fashionable

gymnastics and not despise such out-of-date considerations as beauty and harmony, he may become a temperamental violinist of the first order." All the critics, more or less, had a hit at the "advanced" type of music, and Nigel imagined von Gleichroeder's wrath.

Len insisted on having all the criticisms read to him, and a thrill of pride went through even Janey's numb breast. She had never tried to speak to Nigel alone, and he gave her no hint that he knew she was in trouble. But when his heart was not bursting with anxiety for Len, it brimmed with compassion for Janey. She might have been nursing her brother for weeks instead of hours to judge by her haggard face, white lips, and faded eyes. Her movements were listless, and her figure in rest had the droop of utter exhaustion.

She and Nigel divided the nursing between them. Len was never left alone. He had to be fed every two hours, and it generally took both of them to do it, as he was very perverse in the matter of meals, saying that the food choked him. In the afternoon he became a little delirious. He seemed to be trying to ask for things, and yet to be unable to say what he really meant, often saying something quite different. He was intensely pathetic in his weakness. This dulling, or rather disturbance, of his faculties seemed to distress him far more than his difficult breathing or the pain in his side. Now and then he would hold out his hands piteously to Nigel and Janey, and would lie for some time holding the hand of each, his brown eyes staring at them imploringly, as if they were

fighting for the powers of speech which the tongue had lost—in the way that the eyes of animals often fight.

They tried to make him go to sleep, but he was always restless and awake. They read to him, talked to him and to each other, with no success. Outside, the day was dull, yet warm and steamy. Every now and then a shower would rustle noisily on the leaves, and after it passed there would be many drippings.

Nigel went out for an hour or two's work on the farm when evening fell. It seemed extraordinary that only some eighteen hours lay between him and the concert at the Bechstein Hall. That part of his life had been put aside—not for ever, perhaps, but none the less temporarily banished by a usurping present. Some day, no doubt, he would put on the last six months again, just as he would put on the dress clothes he had folded away, but now he wore corduroys and the last eighteen hours.

At six the doctor called again. He shook his head at the sight of Leonard.

"He must have a nurse," he said.

"Oh, no . . . for heaven's sake!" groaned Len.

"Nigel and I can nurse him," said Janey.

"My dear young lady, have you seen your own face in the glass?"

Len raised himself with difficulty on his pillows.

"Lord, Janey!—you look quite cooked up. . . . I say, old girl, I won't have it. . . . Doctor, I surrender."

"I don't know whether I can send any one in to-night—but I'll try. Anyhow, to-morrow morning—now 'ninety-nine,' please."

Nigel went over to East Grinstead for ice and fruit. Len was dreadfully thirsty all the evening. They put bags of ice on his forehead and sides, but it did not seem to cool him much. The doctor had left a sleeping-draught, to be administered the last thing at night.

"If I take it," said Len, "will you two go to bed?"

"Janey will," said Nigel. "I'll have a shake-down in here."

"Well, it'll keep me quiet, I suppose . . . so I'll take the beastly thing. . . . I want to sleep . . . but I don't want to die. . . . I won't die, in fact."

"Don't talk of it, old man."

He lifted Len in his strong arms, and settled him more comfortably in the bedclothes. Then he gave him the sleeping-draught.

The window was wide open, and one could hear the rain pattering on the lilac bushes. The wind, sweet-smelling with damp and hay, puffed the curtains into the room, then sucked them back. A fire was burning low on the hearth. Janey went and sat beside it. Nigel sat by the bed, for between sleeping and waking his brother suffered from strange fears.

At last, after a few sighs and struggles, Len fell asleep, still high on his pillows, the lines of his face very tired and grim. There was a little light in the room, or rather the mingled lights of a dying

fire and a fighting moon. Nigel rose softly, and went over to Janet.

"You must go to bed."

"No—I'd rather stay here."

"You must have some sleep, or you'll be worn out."

"I couldn't sleep."

The words broke from her in a strangling sigh, and the next minute his arm crept round her, for he remembered Leonard's words.

"Dear Janey . . ." he whispered.

She began to cry.

For a moment or two he held her to him, helping her to choke her sobs against his breast.

"Won't you tell me what it is?"

"How do you know there's anything more than that?" and she pointed towards the bed.

"Len told me."

"About Quentin? . . ."

"Quentin!"

"Yes—I thought you said he'd told you."

"He told me you were wretched about something. But who's Quentin?—not Quentin Lowe?"

They were the very words Len had used, and Janey shuddered.

"Yes . . ." she said faintly, "Quentin Lowe."

"But——"

"You'll never understand. . . . I hid it from you for three years."

"Hid what, Janey?"

"My—my love."

Nigel's arm dropped from her waist, but hers

was round his neck, and she clung to him feverishly.

"Yes, I loved him. I loved him and I pitied him . . . and I wanted, I tried, to help him—and —and I've been his ruin—and another woman has saved him."

Nigel was speechless. What astonished him, the man of secrets, most, was that Janey should have had a secret from him for three years.

"Don't tremble so, darling—but tell me about it. I won't be hard on you."

"You will—when you know all."

"Does Len know all?"

"Yes."

He glanced over to the sleeping man, then put back his arm round Janey's waist.

"Now tell me—all."

Janey told him—all.

For some moments there was silence. The rain was still beating on the leaves, but the moon had torn through the clouds, and flung a white patch over Leonard's feet. The fire was just a red lump, and Janey and Nigel, sitting outside the moonrays, were lost in darkness.

Janey wondered when her brother would speak. She could see the outline of his face, blurred in the shadows. He held his head high, and he had not dropped his arm from her waist, but his free hand was clenched—then she felt the other clench against her side. Sickening fears assailed her. Why did he not speak? Only that arm round her gave her hope. . . .

Then suddenly he took it away, and put both his hands over his face. She saw his shoulders quiver, just for a moment, then for what seemed long moments he did not move.

A paralysis of horror was creeping towards her heart. He was taking things even worse than she had expected, but they did not seem to fill him with anger so much as with grief. His body was crumpled as if under a load, and when he suddenly dropped his hands and looked up at her, she drew back shuddering from what she saw in his eyes.

"My poor boy!—I wish I hadn't told you."

"Oh, God!—oh, God!"

Something in his cowering, hopeless attitude woke all the divine motherhood in Janey. She forgot her fear of unforgiveness, her danger of a rebuff, and put her arms round him, drawing his head to her breast.

"My poor Nigel . . . my poor, poor lad!"—so she comforted him for the shame he felt for her.

After a time, when thought was not quite swallowed up in tenderness, she began to wonder why he let her hold him so.

Then suddenly he rose, and began to pace up and down the room—up and down, up and down, swinging round sharply at the corners, but always, she noticed with a gulp, treading softly for fear of waking Len. She watched him in numb despair. The minutes dragged on. Now and then he put his hand over his brow, as if he fought either for or against some memory, now and then he bent his head so low that she could not see his

face. She wondered how much longer she would be able to endure it.

"Nigel——" she whispered at last.

He stopped and turned towards her.

"Nigel . . ."

"What is it?"

"For heaven's sake . . . don't keep me in suspense."

"Suspense about what?"

"Your forgiveness."

In a moment he was at her side.

"Janey—if I thought you could be doubting that——"

He put his arms round her, and the relief was so sudden that she burst into tears.

"What a selfish hound I am!—wrapped up in my own beastly feelings, and forgetting yours. But I never imagined you could think——"

"I thought . . . perhaps you couldn't."

"Janey, how dare you!"

"When you got up and walked about . . ."

"I know—I know. But that wasn't anger against you—my poor, outraged, suffering darling," and he covered her face with kisses.

She clung to him in a passion of love and relief.

"Oh, you're good—you and Len!"

"Nonsense, Janey. You mustn't talk like that. We're not worthy to tie your shoes—we never shall be. How could you think we'd turn against you? It's him, that little, loathly cad, that——"

"Oh, hush, dear—I can't bear it."

His rage was stronger and fiercer than Len's, his whole body quivered in the passion of it. Then

suddenly it changed unaccountably to grief, and his head fell back against her shoulder, the eyes dull, the mouth old and drawn. She thought it was for her, and he hugged his poor, dead secret too tight to grant her the mercy of disillusion.

The night wore on, and they clung together on the hearthstone, where cinders fell and glowed, making the only sound, the only light, in the room. Two lost children, they huddled together in the only warm place they had left—each other's arms.

There was a feeble sigh, a feeble stirring in the bed—just as the first of the morning came between the curtains, and pointed like a finger into the gloom.

"Lenny. . . ."

Janet and Nigel rose, wearily dropping their stiff arms from each other, and went over to the bed.

"How long have you been awake?"

"Only just woke up . . . would you draw back the curtains?"

Nigel pulled them back, and a white dawn shuddered into the room.

"What time is it?"

"About three—can't you go to sleep again?"

"No—I've wakened for good . . . I mean . . . I mean . . ."

"What, old man?"

"I think I am going to die after all."

"No, Lenny, no. . . ."

"It's rather a come down . . . after saying I wouldn't. . . but I feel so tired."

His face was spread over with a ghastly pallor,

and something which Nigel and Janey could not exactly define, which indeed they hardly saw with their bodily sight, but which impressed them vaguely as a kind of film.

"I'm going to die," he repeated, plucking with cold fingers at the sheet.

"I'll go and fetch the doctor," cried Nigel.

"No . . . I don't want you to leave me."

"But we must do something."

"There's nothing to do . . . only talk to me . . . and don't let me get funky."

"You might look out of the window, Nigel, and see if any one's passing," said Janey.

There was not likely to be any one at that hour, but he thrust his head out and eagerly scanned the lane. The rain had stopped, though the sky was shagged over with masses of cloud. One or two stars glimmered wanly above the woods. It was the constellation of Orion, setting.

"There's no one," said Nigel, "nor likely to be —I must go, Len."

"Oh, no . . . don't . . . don't leave me . . . the doctor couldn't do anything. . . . Perhaps, I won't die . . . only I hate the dark."

A strangling pity seized Nigel. He went over to his brother, and sat down beside the bed, taking his hand.

"There, there, old boy, don't worry. We'll both stay with you. I'll hold this hand, and Janey 'ull hold the other, and you'll soon get over it."

Len lay shivering and gasping. Nigel and

Janey looked into each other's eyes across him, and swallowed their grief.

"I—I expect it's nothing," panted Leonard. "One often feels low at this time of night."

They leaned upon the bed each side of him, and suddenly Janey thrust out her hand and grasped Nigel's across him.

"Now we're all three holding hands," she said.

The minutes flew by. A clock was ticking—measuring them out.

"Kiss me . . ." moaned Leonard suddenly.

They both stooped and kissed him.

He shut his eyes, then opened them, and a strange, piteous resignation was in their glazing depths.

"I'm sorry . . . I must die. . . . I'm so tired."

"You will go to sleep, Len."

"No . . . I'm too tired . . . it wouldn't be enough."

Janey's tears fell on his face.

"Don't cry, Janey . . . it's—it's all right. . . . Remember me to the doctor . . . and say my last words were 'ninety-nine' . . . laugh, Janey . . . it's a joke."

"Lenny, Lenny. . . ."

There was another silence, and a faint flush tinted the watery sky. A bird chirrupped in the eaves of Sparrow Hall.

"Hold my hands tighter," gasped Len.

They both gripped tighter.

"And give my love to Tottie Coughdrop . . . and say I'm sorry to have missed her. . . . Tighter . . . oh! . . . tighter."

His breath came in a fierce, whistling rush, and he sat bolt upright, gripping their hands and struggling.

"Nigel, fetch the doctor!" shrieked Janey.

But Len had his brother's hand in the agonised grip of dying.

"Tighter . . . oh, tighter. . . ."

There was another whistling rush of breath, but this time no struggle—only a sigh.

Len fell back on the pillow, and the terror passed suddenly from his face.

CHAPTER IX

AND YOU ALSO SAID . . .

DURING the week that followed Leonard's death, there was a succession of heavy storms. Chill sodden winds drove June from the fields, and substituted a bleak mock-autumn. Sparrow Hall was full of the moaning winds—they sped down the passages, and throbbed against the doors, they whistled through cracks and chinks, and rumbled in the chimneys.

Janey was in bed for the first few days; she had collapsed utterly. The two blows which had fallen on her almost together had smitten her into a kind of numbness, in which she lay, white and stiff and tearless, through the windy hours. Nigel scarcely ever left her, and he scarcely ever spoke to her—they just crouched together, she on the bed, he on a chair beside it, their fingers twined, both dumbly busy with the problems of death and anguish that had assaulted their lives.

Meantime the routine of the house and farm remained unbroken. The "man" looked after the latter, and through the former moved a figure that seemed strangely out of place. When "Tottie Coughdrop" arrived the morning after Len's death, she proved to be no more or less than a novice from St. Margaret's Convent, and finding her ministrations as truly needed as if her patient had been alive, she did not leave on finding him dead.

She nursed Janey—at least she did for her the little that Nigel could not do; she dusted and cooked; she made Furlonger eat, the stiffest duty of all. It used to hurt Nigel when he thought how Len would have enjoyed seeing him sit down to supper every night with a nun.

Novice Unity Agnes also undertook all the arrangements for the funeral—which had always been a nightmare to Nigel and Janey. Moreover, the day before, she went to East Grinstead and bought a black skirt and blouse and hat for Janey, who but for her would never have thought of going into mourning at all; and though her charity was not able to overcome her diffidence and buy a mourning suit for Nigel, she sewed black bands on all his coats.

That was how it happened that the funeral of Leonard Furlonger was such a surprise to the inhabitants of the Three Counties. The coffin was met at the church door by the choir headed by a crucifix, and the service was read by a priest in a black cope. There were hymns too—Novice Unity Agnes's favourites, all about as appropriate as "How doth the little busy bee"—and incense, and a little collection of nuns, persuaded by the kind-hearted novice to swell the scanty number of mourners. In fact, as Nigel remarked bitterly, the whole thing was a joke, and it was a shame Len had missed it.

He and Janey walked home alone, arm in arm, through the wet lanes. As usual, they did not speak, but they strained close together as the solitude of the fields crept round them. The rain had

cleared, but the wind was still romping in the hedges—little tearful spreads of sky showed among the clouds, very pale and rain-washed, soon swallowed up by moving shapes of storm.

Janet went to bed early. She had suddenly found that she could sleep, and her appetite for sleep became abnormal. She woke each morning greedily counting the hours till night. In the old careless days she had never set such store on sleep, because it had meant merely strengthening and resting and refreshing; now it meant what was more to her than anything else in life—forgetting.

Nigel could not sleep. In his heart the lights were not yet all put out. There were flashes of terror and sparks of desire, and dull flares of conjecture. He had sometimes hesitated whether he should tell Janey his secret, but had drawn back on each occasion, urged partly by the thought of adding to her burden, but principally by a feeling of shame. His wonderful dream, which had sustained him so triumphantly during six months of work and sacrifice, had now shrivelled into a poor little secret, such as school-girls nurture—a love which must always be hidden and silent and unconsummated.

His brain ached with regrets and revisualisations, quaked with apprehension and the knowledge of his own utter helplessness in the face of circumstances. The thought of Lowe's perfidy to Janet would rouse in him a sweat of rage from his poor attempts at sleep. Janey stood to Nigel for all that was noble, meek and understanding, and that she should be treated heartlessly and lightly by a

scoundrel not worthy to black her boots, was a thought that drove him nearly rabid with hate. What was he to do to save Tony from this swine? He knew perfectly well how she would look upon him if she heard his story. He remembered the hard, stiff little figure in the garden of Shovelstrode—"You won my friendship under false pretences." What would she say to the cad who had won by false pretences not only her friendship but her body, her heart and her soul? Yet he could never tell her the truth. He would not betray Janet even to this girl he loved, and a vague accusation could easily be denied by Lowe, and was not likely to be believed by Tony.

Often he envied Len—lost in cool sleep, free from responsibilities and problems, eased for ever from the soul-chafing burdens of hate and love.

It was the beginning of July. Sunshine baked on the fields, and drank the green out of the grass, so that the fields were brown, with splashes of yellow where the buttercups still grew. In the hedges the wild elder-rose sent out its sickening sweetness, while from the ditches came the even more cloying fragrance of the meadowsweet. The haze of a great heat veiled the distance from Nigel, as he tramped over the parched grass into Kent. He saw the roofs of Scarlets and Redpale shimmering in the valley of the hammer ponds, but beyond them was a fiery, thundering dusk, which swallowed up the hills of Cowden in the east.

He walked with bent head and arms slack. He

shut off from life, where he could drowse—and forget.

This evening only the first part of his desire was satisfied. He had his corner, but he could not drowse in it. His limbs lay inert, but his thoughts kicked painfully. His brain hammered with old impressions, which, instead of wearing away with time, each day bored and jarred with renewed power. He was the victim of an abnormally acute mentality—just as to a swollen limb the lightest touch is painful, so to Nigel's brain, inflamed with grief and struggle, every impression was like a blow, an enduring source of agony.

He heard footsteps on the path. No one could see him—it was still quite light in the fields, but in the wood was dusk and a blurring of outlines; besides, he was deeply buried in the tall stalks. However, though he could not be seen, he could see, for on the path stood a golden pillar of sunshine into which the footsteps must pass. Nigel wondered if it could be Lowe, returning early for some reason from Shovelstrode. But the steps did not sound heavy enough, and the next minute he saw the white of a woman's dress through the trees. In an instant his limbs had shrunk together, for another of those sickening blows had smitten his brain. The figure had passed out of the pillar of sunset, but he had seen Tony Strife as she went by.

She was dressed in white, and wore no hat, only a muslin scarf over her hair. She carried a cloak on her arm, and Furlonger realised that she must be going to dine at Redpale. The sight of Tony

—he had not seen her since he lost her, or rather his dream of her—threw him into a fit of torment. He flung himself back among the stalks, and rolled there, biting them, suddenly mad with pain.

The next moment he started up. A thud and a low cry came from a few yards further on.

Nigel sprang to his feet. He remembered that not far off the path ran by the mouth of a disused chalk quarry, from which it was divided only by a very rickety fence. Suppose . . . He crashed through the bushes to the path, and dashed along it to the chalk-pit. Something white lay only a few feet from the dreadful brink.

Just here the path was in darkness—hazel bushes and a dense thicket of alder shut out the sun. For a moment he could not make out clearly what had happened, but was immediately reassured by seeing Tony sit up, and try to struggle to her feet.

"What is it?" she cried, hearing his steps behind her. "Who's there?"

"Are you hurt?"

"Oh, Mr. Furlonger . . ."

She made another struggle to rise, but could not without his hand.

"Are you hurt?" he repeated.

"No-o-o."

"I think you are a little."

He was trembling all over, and hoped she did not notice it.

"I fell over some wire, just here, where the path

is so dark. I might have gone over the edge," she added with a shudder.

"You had a lucky escape—but I'm afraid you're hurt."

"It isn't much. I may have twisted my ankle a bit, that's all."

She stood there in the shadows, her white dress gleaming like a moth, her face mysterious in the disarray of her wrap. Nigel's eyes devoured her, while his heart filled itself with inexpressible pain.

"Take my arm," he said huskily, "and I'll help you back to Shovelstrode."

"Oh, no!—I'll go on to Redpale. It's much nearer—if you'll be so kind as to help me."

"But how about getting home?"

"My fiancé, Mr. Lowe, will drive me home. He was to have fetched me too, but at the last moment he had to go up to town, and couldn't be back in time."

"Are you sure you're well enough to go out to dinner?" He hated the idea of taking her to Redpale.

"Oh, quite—this is nothing. Besides, dining at Redpale is just like dining at home—I don't call it going 'out' to dinner."

Furlonger winced, and gave her his arm, hoping she would not notice how it shook.

They walked slowly out of Furnace Wood, towards the leaden east. Tony limped slightly, and Nigel wanted to carry her, but he dared not risk his patched self-control too far.

"You should never have come all this way

alone," he said gruffly, "these woods by the quarries are dangerous."

"I expect my father will be furious when he finds out what I've done. But I hoped that if I walked across the fields, instead of driving round by the road, I—I might meet my fiancé on his way home from the station."

A tremulous archness crept into her voice. Nigel shuddered.

"I'm pleased I met you," she said gently, after a pause, "because I wanted to tell you how dreadfully sorry I am about your brother."

"Thank you."

"And I want to tell you that I'm so glad about your success in London. I saw in the papers how you distinguished yourself at Herr von Gleichroeder's concert."

Nigel did not speak.

"I suppose you'll soon be going back to town?" she went on timidly.

"I don't know. I can't leave my sister."

"But you can take her with you. It would be a pity to throw up your career just when everything looks so promising."

They were not far from Redpale now. The sunset was creeping over the sky—only the east before them was dark, banked high with thundery vapour. Nigel could still hear Tony speaking, as if in a kind of dream. His thoughts were busy elsewhere.

"Won't you?" repeated Tony for the second time.

"Won't I what?"

"Go back to London, and make yourself famous."

"I don't see much chance of that."

"But I do—and so will you when you're not so unhappy. Now, to please me, won't you promise to go back to London and make yourself a great career? You and I used to be friends once—I hope we're friends still—and I shall always be interested in everything you do. I expect to see your name in a very high place some day. Now, for my sake, promise to go back."

"For your sake. . . ."

"Yes—since you won't go for your own."

They had stopped a moment to rest her foot. Nigel lifted his eyes from the grass and looked into hers—wondering. Was it true, was it even possible, that she had never seen his love? She could not, or she would not speak like this—"For my sake." After all, she would never expect him to dare . . . that would blind her to much that might have betrayed him had he been worthier. No, she had not seen his love, and she had never loved him. She had never loved any man but Quentin Lowe—he was her first love, he had lit the first flame in her heart, and that heart was his, in all its purity and burning.

Standing there beside her in the sunset, her weight resting deliciously on him as she raised her injured foot from the ground, he realised the change that had come to Tony. Her manner was as entirely different from her manner of six months ago at Shovelstrode as that had been different from the manner of those still earlier days at Lingfield

or Brambletye. In those days, during their playtime, Tony had been a school-girl, a delightful hoyden, the best pal and fellow-adventurer a man could have. In December, in the garden at Shovelstrode, she had lost that valiant girlhood, and at the same time her womanhood was unripe—she had been a crude mixture of girl and woman, sometimes provokingly both, sometimes repellingly neither. But to-day she was woman complete. Both her mind and her body seemed to have stepped out of their green adolescence. There was a certain dignity of curve about the tall figure resting against him, which Nigel had not seen in the forest or in the garden; there was a clear and confident look in the eyes which in earlier days had been either wistful or timid; there was a heightened colour on the cheeks. Her manner was full of gentle assurance, her speech easy and sympathetic—as utterly different from the crude tactlessness of Christmastide as from the school-girl rattle of November.

Yes, Tony was a woman come into her kingdom, proud, sweet, compassionate and strong. Quentin Lowe had made her this in the short weeks of his love. Unworthy little cad as he was, he had yet been able to raise her from girlhood to womanhood, to crown her with the diadem of her heritage. . . .

"Tony," cried Nigel, caught in a sudden storm of impulse, "do you love Quentin Lowe?"

"Love him!—why, of course. . . . Let's move on."

"You're not angry with me?—I have my reason for asking."

"No, I'm not angry. But what reason can you have?"

"I remember," said Nigel desperately, "what you told me six months ago. You said you couldn't forgive. . . ."

The colour rushed to his face, but he fought on.

"There is something which I think you ought to know about him."

"What do you mean?"

She spoke sharply, but not quite so sharply as he had expected.

"Miss Strife—it's very difficult for me . . . but I think I ought——"

"I suppose," she said, her voice faltering a little, "you're trying to tell me—you think you ought to tell me—that Quentin hasn't always been quite—quite worthy of himself. I know."

"You know!"

"Yes."

There was silence, broken only by the swish of their footsteps through the grass.

"How did you know?—Who told you?" cried Furlonger suddenly.

"I might ask—how do *you* know?"

"The girl—was a friend of mine. . . ."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Don't mistake me. I—I didn't love her—not in that way, I mean. But, Tony—who told you?"

"Quentin."

"My God!"

"Why are you so surprised? It was right that he should tell me."

"Of course. But I—I didn't think he would."

Tony hesitated a moment—it struck Nigel that she was considering how far she ought to take him into her confidence. The thought humiliated him.

"He did tell me," she said after a pause, "he told me everything, one night, nearly three weeks ago, just before your brother died. He suddenly came to Shovelstrode—very late, after we had all gone upstairs. He wanted to see me—and I came down . . . oh, I shall never forget it! He was standing there, all white and tired—and very wet, as if he'd been lying in the grass. He tried to speak, but he couldn't—and I was frightened, like a silly ass, and I cried . . . and then he told me all about himself—and this girl."

"And you? . . ."

She shuddered.

"I—I told him he must go."

"You told him to go!"—his voice had a hungry catch in it.

"Yes—I was a beast."

Anxiety and scorn strove together in him.

"But you changed your mind."

She nodded.

"Tony!"

"Well, why not?"

"Because it's paltry and weak of you—he doesn't deserve your forgiveness—and you've no right to forgive him for what he did to another woman."

"Do you think I haven't considered that other woman?"

"You must have. But—egad!—you're so calm about it. Don't you realise what all this means—to her?"

"You think I ought to make him marry her?"

"Of course not—she wouldn't have him if she was paid. But—but how can *you* marry him, Tony?"

She bit her lip.

"I'm sorry I put things so bluntly, but I'm always a blundering ass when I'm excited. Tony, you're not to marry this man."

By her mounting colour he saw that he had said too much.

"I beg your pardon—I know all this sounds like impertinent interference. But it isn't. I've been worrying about it a lot—about your marrying him. I felt you ought to know. . . ."

"Well, I do know—and I've forgiven him."

"I'm not sure that isn't even worse than your not knowing."

She stared at him in anger and surprise.

"You say that!—you!—the man but for whom perhaps I never should have forgiven him."

Nigel gasped. "What do you mean?"

"Well, at first, as I told you, I felt I couldn't forgive him. But afterwards I remembered all you said."

"*I* said!"

"Yes."

"What?—When?"

"Don't you remember that day you came over to

Shovelstrode and said, 'You will have to forgive me a great many things because I am so very hungry'?"

They had stopped again; the fields swelled round them, ghostly in the lemon twilight, and a wistful radiance glowed on Tony's face. He searched her eyes despairingly—he scarcely knew what for. The anger in them had died, and in its place was a beautiful serenity and kindliness. But that was not what he was looking for. His heart was full of hunger and tears, yet he did not hunger or cry for the woman who stood before him, but for the little girl he had known long months ago.

"Quentin used almost the same words as you did," she said, breaking the silence, "he told me how all his life he had been hungry, always craving for something good and pure and satisfying, never able to reach it. Then he met this girl, and he thought that he'd find in her all he was seeking. But he found only sorrow—sorrow for them both. He was in despair, in hell—and he believed I could help him out and make him a good man again. Don't you remember how you said that a man's only chance of rising out of the mud was for some woman to give him a hand and help him up?"

Nigel could not find words. A thick, misty horror was settling on him. Had those poor pleadings of his dying self then turned against him in his hour of need?

"There was Quentin asking for my help," continued Tony. "Oh, I know I'm no better than other girls, than the girl he used to love, but some-

how I can't help feeling I'm the girl sent to help Quentin. When I told him he must go, he nearly went crazy . . . his father said he was afraid he would kill himself . . . and I—I was nearly mad too, for I—oh, God! I loved him."

A sounding contralto note swept into her voice; it seemed to swell up from her heart, from her heaving woman's breast on which her hands were folded.

"So I forgave him."

"Tony! . . ." cried Nigel faintly.

"Yes—I'm grateful to you. I'm afraid that when I saw you at Shovelstrode I was very stupid and stiff—I was a horrid little beast, and I couldn't forgive you for what was after all an honour you had done me. Now I see how much your friendship meant to me. But for you, Quentin and I might have been parted for ever."

A stupid rage was tearing Furlonger, and there was a mockery of laughter in it. He saw that his tragedy was after all only a farce—he was the time-honoured lover of farce, who with infinite pains makes a ladder to his lady's chamber, and then sees his rival swarm up it. There he stood, forlorn, discomfited, frustrated—but also intensely comic. Perhaps the student was right about Offenbach. . . .

"I'm surprised that you should be so disgusted with me," said Tony.

The ghostly laughter pealed again, and at the same time he remembered that "if the man's a sport, he laughs too." He threw back his head, and startled her with a hearty laugh.

it—it's his love for me. And all the sorrow he went through, when he thought he'd lost me, seems to have made him gentler and humbler somehow. Quentin has suffered dreadfully"—there was a little click in her throat—"and he wants so much to be good and pure and true. And I've promised to help him, by believing that he can and will do better."

His own words were being mercilessly fired back at him. He remembered how he had first breathed them to her, full of hope and entreaty. In the face of such artillery his rout was complete.

"Forgive him, Tony!" he cried. "Forgive him! But oh, forgive me, too!"

They had reached the gate of Redpale Farm. He stopped—he would go no further.

"Tony—forgive me too."

The words broke from his lips in an exceeding bitter cry.

"Forgive you!—what for?"

"For a great deal—for all you know of, and for the more you don't know."

"Of course I forgive you—but I thank you most."

"No, you must forgive me most—are you sure that you forgive me for what you don't know as well as for what you know?"

"Quite sure"—her voice trembled a little, for he was beginning to frighten her.

"Then good-bye."

"Good-bye. I—I hope I haven't brought you very far out of your way."

He muttered something unintelligible, pulled off his cap, and left her.

He walked quickly, pricked on by a discovery which was also a triumph. Quentin Lowe had not taken Tony from him after all. The Tony he loved had never known Quentin Lowe, she had been no man's friend but Nigel Furlonger's—and so much his friend that when he had been taken from her she would not stay without him, but herself had gone away. Quentin Lowe loved a beautiful woman—proud and sweet and assured, with just a dash of the prig about her. Nigel had never loved this woman, he had loved a little girl —and the little girl who had been his comrade in the Kentish lanes and the ruins of Brambletye, would never be any man's but his.

He plunged recklessly through the fields, and recklessly into Furnace Wood. Lowe could not be far off. He must have missed the fast train from Victoria, but the next one arrived only an hour or so later. Nigel hurried through the wood, now coal dark, and full of a strange dread for him—though he did not know of the ghosts which haunted it. As he caught his first glimpse of the faintly crimsoned west, he saw a figure outlined against it. Some one was coming down the slope of Furnace Field. It must be Lowe.

The two men met on the rim of the wood. It was a moment of blackness for Quentin when he saw the blazing eyes and bitten lips of Furlonger. Strange words broke from his tongue—

"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!"

Nigel's great body towered over him. His lips had shrunk back from his teeth, which gleamed in the dying ugly light. Lowe remembered the other Furlonger who was dead. In Furnace Wood fate would not tamper with vengeance as at Cowsanish.

Suddenly Nigel spoke.

"Two good women have forgiven you—so I've nothing to say—or do. Pass——"

He moved out of the path, and waved his hand towards the wood.

"Pass——" he said.

Quentin hesitated a moment.

"Won't—won't you shake hands?"

"No. Pass—and for God's sake, pass quickly."

CHAPTER X

A TOAST

A FEW faint stars were in the west as Nigel tramped towards it. They seemed to swim up out of the eddies of crimson fog that floated there—they seemed to be showing little candles of hope to the man who turned his back on the east. The castle of the dayspring lay behind him, swallowed in thundery murk, but before him were the lights of a broader palace where dead hopes and dead hatreds keep state together.

The west glowed and trembled and purpled—fiery rays rested on the woods, and reached over the sky to the moon. Then against the purple showed a tall chimney, rising from a high-roofed cottage that squatted in the fields of Wilderwick.

As Nigel walked down the hill towards Sparrow Hall, a great quickening realisation struck his exhausted heart. He knew that his dream was not dead. Tony, the light in which he had seen it, was gone for ever, but the dream itself was still there in the dark. For six months he had tried to lead a good and honourable life, and now, though the motive was gone, the old desire remained as strong and white as ever. He could never be as he had been before he met Tony. He knew now that it was not she that had called him—she had merely opened his ears to a voice that had been calling him all through his life, through struggle, lust and pain, failure and hate—and was calling

him still, through the utter darkness. The child in him, which had desperately sought congenial comradeship in a little girl, rose out of the wreck, and heard as in a dream the voices of boys and girls in London, laughing, fooling and ragging together, calling to all in him that was gay and young and outrageous. He wanted to go back to London, he wanted to play and to work, and to win for himself what he had once yearned to win for Tony. His music, that one touch of the poetic and supernatural in his sordid, materialistic life, would raise him up in this his Last Day, and give him his heart's desire—his desire for a clean life and an honourable name.

He stood for a moment in the great lonely field—the last of the sun and the first of the moon upon him, around him the dawning eternity of the stars. Two hours ago he had been festering, sick, with his schemes, the comrade of a hundred repulsive ideas. Now he was alone—utterly alone with his one great ambition, stripped of the last rag of personal motive that had clung to it—his ambition to be honest and pure and true.

Tony had pointed him out the way, and directly he had taken it, she had gone—to show it to another man, and walk in it with him. Nigel suddenly pictured that man. He was at Redpale Farm . . . he kneeled in the dust at Tony's feet . . . her hands were upon his head. In her he found redemption, love and blessing—and dared he, Furlonger, grudge redemption, love and blessing to any man? He did not grudge them—let Quentin Lowe take them, walk in white with Tony,

and be worthy of her. Furlonger, too, would walk in white and be worthy—but he would walk alone.

No, not quite alone. He trod softly up the path to Sparrow Hall, between the ranks of the folded flowers. The evening primroses and night-scented stock sent their fragrance in with him at the door. The house was in darkness, and he groped his way to the kitchen, where he found Janey.

She was half asleep in the armchair by the fire—she had laid the supper, that dreary little supper for two, and now lay huddled by the dying embers, cold, in spite of the thick heat of the night.

"Janey," whispered Nigel, as he kissed her.

She started.

"Oh, you're back at last!—what a time you've been!"

"I'm sorry, dear. Come now, I'll light the lamp, and we'll have supper."

She rose listlessly, and sat down opposite him.

"It's a rotten supper—I don't cook so well as Novice Unity Agnes."

"Nonsense! you cook quite well enough for me. Janey—will you come and cook for me in London?"

"In London?"—she stared at him blankly.

"Yes, I must go back to my work—and I can't leave you here."

"But—but—I don't understand—and what shall we do about the farm?"

"We can sell it, and the money will keep us—just the two of us in a workman's flat—till my training is over, and I'm earning money on my

own. Oh, Janey, I don't suppose I'll ever be rich or famous or that I'll fill the Albert Hall—but I—I shall be more worthy of you, dear."

"Of me!"—she laughed.

"Yes. Don't you understand? I've got my dream back again—but there's an empty place in it . . . Will you fill it, Janey?"

She looked questioningly at him with her great haggard eyes.

"Who left it empty?"

"Tony Strife," he said in a low voice.

"Nigel! . . ."

She rose to her feet and came to him.

"My poor, poor boy."

Her pity, the first he had received, had an unexpected effect on him. It nearly unmanned him—he put up his hands to her neck, and drew down her face to him, while his body shuddered.

"Nigel . . . did she know?"

"No, never—thank God!"

She stroked his hair, and held his head against her breast.

"It was a hopeless dream, Janey."

She could not contradict him.

"But it helped me."

"Then it was a good dream."

He gently slipped himself free.

"And now we'll say no more about it."

After supper Janey asked Nigel to play to her. He often used to play to her in the evenings, to relieve the aching weight of agony that gathered on her with the dusk. She lay back in the armchair, her eyes closed, wondering why Nigel's

music, which she had used sometimes to hate, soothed her so inexpressibly now. She always asked him to play when she felt her heart was becoming hard—music seemed to melt down that stony sense of outrage which sometimes grew like a cancer into her thoughts. She would not, dared not, have a hard heart, and music was the only thing at present that could keep it soft.

She thought with gathering tears of the confession her brother had just made her, but she would not let her mind dwell on it—somehow she felt he would not like it. The episode did not belong to the surface of things, it belonged to the hidden life of a secret man, a holy, hopeless thing, to be guarded from the prying even of reverent thoughts. She knew that though she and Nigel might often talk together of her sorrow, they would never talk of his.

He was playing a strange tune that pattered on the silence like rain. It was the song of the man who has dreamed of love, who has wakened at last to find it only a dream, and that he lies with empty arms on a hard bed—and then suddenly realises that he has before him that which is sweeter than sleep and dreams—the joy of the day's work. He played the Prelude of the Day's Work, through which would trill the magic memory of love—love, which is so much sweeter in memory and in dream than in realisation.

At last he put aside his violin, and going over to Janey, he knelt down by her and kissed her tired face.

"Oh, Nigel . . . Nigel!"

"You'll come with me to London, and help me in my new life?"

"I want a new life too."

"We'll start one together."

"And—and you'll play the devil out of me when he comes?"

"Always—and we won't have any secrets from each other, Janey."

She smiled faintly. Her brother always amused her when he spoke of secrets.

There was silence for some minutes. The moon was leaving the window, climbing high among the stars. A little wind began to flutter round Sparrow Hall, whispering and throbbing.

"I'm tired," said Janey.

"You must go to bed."

"Yes."

"And you'll dream of the life you and I are going to live together—of success for me, and happiness for you."

She rose and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Good-night, lad."

"Good-night. I think I'm going to bed too. I think I can sleep to-night. But before we go we must drink a toast, Janey."

"A toast!—to whom?"

"To—to two people who we thought were going to make you and me happy—but are going to make each other happy instead."

She did not answer for a moment. She and her brother stood facing each other in the strange freak of lamplight and moonlight. Then she said—

"Yes. We must *want* them to be happy, Nigel."

He turned to the uncleared supper-table and poured out some of the red wine that Janey drank in these days of her weakness.

"We'll drink to their happiness, old sister. We won't go whining and grudging because it isn't ours. Besides, we're going to have it some day—we'll make a new lot of our own."

"Yes, Nigel"—Janey's eyes had kindled—"we're not going to grudge them what they've got, or be envious and mean."

They faced each other across the table. The wind gave a sudden little sigh round Sparrow Hall—blustered—and was still.

"A toast!" cried Nigel, lifting his glass, "a toast!—To those who've got what we have lost."

THE END

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THE THREE FURLONGERS

BY

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

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